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ORDERED CHAOS:  
THE IMPLICATIONS OF CHILDREARING IN  
THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP  
POSITIONS

A Dissertation

by

ANGELIA TRIVETTE WRIGHT

Submitted to the Graduate School

Appalachian State University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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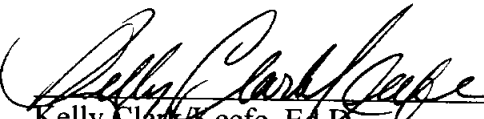
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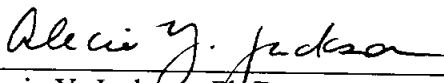
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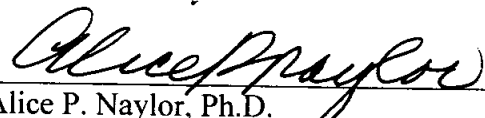
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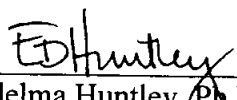
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ABSTRACT

ORDERED CHAOS:

THE IMPLICATIONS OF CHILDREARING IN

THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

POSITIONS. (MAY 2008)

Angelia Trivette Wright, B.S. Appalachian State University

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The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the intersection of the roles of motherhood and educational leadership. The primary focus of this feminist research was to explore how women maintain dual roles as mothers of young children and senior-level educational leaders in public schools, community colleges, and universities. More specifically, this research examined how women who maintain these dual roles describe maneuvering through the personal and professional dimensions of their lives and the perceptions they develop of themselves along the way. The results of this research are intended to contribute to theory that helps explicate the dual meanings held by women attempting to straddle the social categories of “mother” and “professional,” specifically mothers caring for young children who also maintain high-level positions in educational leadership.

Multiple interview sessions were conducted and supporting documents gathered from the six participants of the study. In addition, the author maintained a personal journal



throughout the research process to respond reflectively to questions that emerged regarding research methodology and her own personal experiences as a mother and educational leader. Feminist content analysis was applied to the interview data, documents, and the author's journal. The subsequent results are presented through a work of autoethnographic fiction and then a detailed exploration of emergent themes.

The six participants of the study came from vastly different backgrounds but often relayed similar "stories" about their lives as mothers and educational leaders. The constructs that emerged from the interviews were bound together within the two overarching themes of *sacrifice* and *self-perception*. The results of these interviews suggest that women who occupy the dual roles of mother and educational leader may find they sacrifice their health and their time due to the conflicting demands of the job and parenting. The perceptions that these women developed of themselves were influenced by three primary sources: society, co-workers, and their own children. These perceptions often conveyed conflicted feelings about how others perceived them in their dual roles.

The results of this dissertation support the notion that mothers who attempt to maintain a senior-level position of educational leadership while simultaneously parenting young children risk encountering a "maternal wall" (Williams, 2000). The primary findings suggest women encounter this obstacle due to the conflicting demands of both roles and the outside perceptions that influence how they perceive themselves. These findings help expand upon and provide needed context for theories that purport to explain the current underrepresentation of mothers with young children in senior-level positions of educational leadership.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank a number of people without whom this document would not have been possible. First, I would like to thank the six women who graciously agreed to participate in this study. I am deeply indebted to the six participants of my study for their willingness to provide me and the readers of the dissertation a glimpse of their lives as mothers and educational leaders. Their experiences and perspectives were inspiring and provide a hopeful model for other women who will one day follow a similar life path.

Words cannot express the level of gratitude that I feel towards my dissertation chair, Dr. Kelly Clark/Keefe. Her support has been a beacon for me as I often questioned my ability to maneuver through the research process and produce a document that contributes something of value to my field. Kelly, along with the wonderful members of my committee, Dr. Alecia Youngblood-Jackson and Dr. Martha McCaughey, have been an inspiration to me as women, educators, and mothers.

The doctoral program, under the superb leadership of Dr. Alice Naylor, has been such a source of support throughout not only the dissertation but also during the earlier stages of coursework and subsequent internship. To my fellow cohort, thank you all for your friendship and allowing me to learn alongside you. I take away something from each of you – Cheryl, Scarlett, Wanda, Myra, Eric, Jamie, and Mark.

Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to my family. I am so humbled and honored to be part of your lives. Your love, support, encouragement, and the occasional nudge are what

have sustained me throughout this process. I dedicate this dissertation to my children, Max and Sofie. You are the two most wonderful people I know and I am so proud of you. Since your birth, you both have been deeply entwined within my being. I appreciate the sacrifices you have both made over the last five years while I have pursued my dream. When the time comes for each of you to pursue your dreams, I will be there to love, support, encourage and provide the occasional nudge too. Lastly, CD. You have been my partner in this journey and your belief in me never wavered. Thank you! To you and the children, my deepest love.

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## PRELUDE

I hear a slight whimper and the familiar rustle of a diaper between little, kicking legs. I drift in and out of sleep, as my body disregards my mind's insistence to get out of bed. I lie there and the whimpering and kicking intensify. If I wait longer that faint sound will only progress into a cry and then everyone will wake up. I drag myself out of bed and wearily make my way to the crib. I glance at the digital clock. My 3:30 a.m. wake up call is right on schedule.

Sofie and I make our way into the dark living room. I turn on the lamp and change her diaper. After preparing a bottle, we settle onto the couch. At first, her eyes are wide open and we gaze at each other. As I take pleasure in sharing this exchange with my daughter I am also keenly aware of the books sitting on the floor in front of me. The books are another world that is constantly beckoning me whenever I have a free moment. Ten minutes later the rhythm of sucking is slower and Sofie's eyes begin to close. I would never read while she is awake even though I have mastered the ability to hold baby and bottle in one arm and a book with my free hand. How can the words in a book ever compare to the gaze in my daughter's eyes? Since she *is* falling asleep I seize the opportunity to get some work done. I carefully remove a book from the top of the stack and begin to read.

Fifteen minutes later Sofie sucks the final drops of milk from her bottle and almost as suddenly as she had drifted off to sleep she reemerges wide awake. She looks at me with



her big, blue eyes. The seven weeks since birth have gone by so fast. I enjoy these late night exchanges with my daughter. After sometime I attempt to coax her back to sleep. When rocking doesn't work, I pull out my *secret* tool, known to many mothers, the automatic swing. I place her in the seat, dim the lights, and turn on the Fisher Price® Aquarium. Within a few minutes her eyes begin to get heavy. I take this opportunity to get in a few more pages of reading but with the rhythmic sounds of the swing and aquarium *my* eyes begin to close. I continue reading but the longer I try the more I find myself rereading the same passages.

Finally, around 5:00am Sofie falls asleep. I still have another 50 pages to go. This would be a great opportunity to get the reading done because the house is quiet, everyone is asleep, and I wouldn't be taking time away from anyone by working at this hour. But, sleep is a precious commodity and my body makes the choice for me on this night.

I pick up Sofie, so still, and we make our way back into the darkened bedroom. I place her in the crib and kiss her forehead. I check on Max and pull up the blanket over his exposed arms. He snuggles underneath and I kiss his two-year old, dimpled cheeks.

The sense of relaxation I feel when I lie down is heavenly. Every part of my body and mind sinks into the bed. I curl up in the comforter and slide underneath my husband's arm. I fall asleep within moments but with the lingering guilt that I did not force myself to work longer. My last thought as I drift off: In less than two hours another day will begin.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION – IDEAL WORKER AND IDEAL MOTHER

### Early Meanings about Motherhood

Being a good parent to my children is of utmost importance to me yet I struggle each day with how to reconcile feelings of responsibility with desires to pursue my professional goals. How can I manage the demands of a senior-level educational leadership position and still be a good mother? Is it possible to be a good parent and a successful educational leader? Are women who attempt to negotiate across both spheres conflicted by the demands often associated with each role and therefore left to wonder if the roles are in opposition? This dissertation examined these and other questions related to the interplay of the roles of motherhood and educational leadership, specifically the unique tensions female educational leaders with young children face.

My mother first introduced me to what it means to be a woman and mother. She was and still is, however, a mystery to me. From the early experiences with my mother I have struggled to define what it means to be an “ideal mother,” if there is such a concept. My mother was a “stay-at-home mom” and she participated in all the activities a “good mother” was supposed to. She volunteered for the PTA and attended parent-teacher conferences. I always recall her saying how “fortunate” she was to be able to stay at home with her children. In reflecting back upon that time I remember thinking even though my mother said she was “fortunate” I didn’t really believe her. I have a master’s degree in psychology and my experience in the field has led me to believe that my mother repressed many of her own desires to “be more” than a “stay-at-home mom.”

I noticed a pattern in my mother's behavior of put downs about the few working mothers of my school-aged friends. I recall making weird associations as a child about what a "working mother" was like. Families that had mothers who worked outside the home *always* had dinner made from a can, whereas, my mother prided herself on *always* preparing our meals from scratch. As I grew into a young woman and thought about having children of my own, I knew I wanted to be a happy mother and I equated that with working outside the home. I felt my mother clearly did not find caring for her children rewarding and fulfilling, and I didn't want to feel that way. As a child thoughts of being an ideal mother became contingent upon also being an ideal worker. I remember thinking that I wanted to be a mom who made dinner from a can.

Throughout the rest of my childhood and early adulthood I came away with a very confusing and contradictory model of what it meant to be a woman, mother, and a career professional. I was expected to go to college but then return home to run the family farm. For several years following graduate school I suppressed my desires to do and be more. Eventually, the desire became too strong and I refused to continue stifling my needs to have a professional life and to build a family of my own. My decision to move away from my family was my first step towards realizing my own dreams and developing an identity outside my family.

### Connecting the Past with the Present

As I began a doctoral program in educational leadership five years ago, I looked for mentors. I had no family models to call upon for a foundation. Unfortunately, my first semester in the program did not provide any faculty models. My professors were primarily male and parents of much older children. During the time period when I conducted my research I was a department chair at a mid-sized community college in the

southeast. Here, I looked for female colleagues with young children but also to no avail. All the women at this college in senior leadership positions waited until their children were much older than mine to pursue the path I was beginning to traverse. Several female colleagues even elected not to have children.

When I shared my decision to balance all these roles, my colleagues and family often responded, “Are you nuts? How are you going to do all this?” So, my last place to look for support was my doctoral cohort. All of the women, except for one, either had older children almost ready to leave the home or no children. The lone exception left the program at the beginning of the second year due to the competing demands of motherhood, career, and doctoral studies. Until meeting my doctoral advisor, there were no women in my immediate professional circle that occupied the roles of mother to young children and educational leader simultaneously. I was left wondering why I could point to only one woman from either my personal or professional circle that was negotiating between both spheres. This curiosity led me to consider conducting a formal exploration into the points of intersection between these roles.

As I began this process of balancing motherhood, marriage, doctoral studies, and a professional career, I thought back to my mother. I had a very difficult time recalling experiences with her that provided a foundation for me as I attempted to occupy all these roles. I felt such a sense of abandonment by my mother. She didn’t show me how to do this, how to be an ideal mother and/or an ideal worker. I needed her and the model she didn’t provide. I began to question whether it was possible for me to “have it all.” Could I be an educational leader, a mother, wife, and have a little something left over for myself? As I considered my aspirations more seriously, I became deeply concerned about my relationship with my children. Would they still see me as a good mother even though the

demands of a senior level position in educational leadership might have an impact on our experiences and relationship?

I know traversing a leadership path can be a difficult journey for women, without even considering the addition of parenting. The field of education has been heavily populated by women, so it would then stand to reason that women would fill many of the leadership positions. This has not been the case. Williams (1995) found that men in female-dominated fields such as nursing and education rather than bumping into the “glass ceiling” women face in male-dominated fields ride the “glass escalator” to the top leadership positions. Interestingly, women even in female-dominated fields like education are still grossly underrepresented in the senior most leadership positions (Blount, 1998). What’s standing in the way – education, time on the job, or something else? My experiences have led me to consider the impact of motherhood from three vantage points; societal views on mothering, institutional structures formed around these conceptions, and personal beliefs about parenting. The areas of motherhood (Bhalalusesa, 1998; Evans; 1989; Shakeshaft, 1987) and women in education (Grogan, 1996; Maloney, 1998; McGrath, 1992) have received significant study in isolation but little attention in concert (Blount, 1998; Grogan, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1987).

The following dissertation has explored the intersection of the roles of motherhood and educational leadership. The primary focus of this research was to explore how seven women, age 30 – 55, maintain dual roles as mothers of young children and senior-level educational leaders (i.e., at least 50% of their job responsibilities include administration and supervision such as one would find for a vice president, dean, principal, or department chair) in public schools, community colleges, and universities. More specifically, I explored how women who maintain these dual roles describe maneuvering

through the personal and professional dimensions of their lives and the perceptions they develop of themselves along the way. The resulting research is intended to contribute to theory that helps explicate the dual meanings held by women attempting to straddle the social categories of “mother” and “professional” and to consider how mainstream societal expectations have impacted the feminine psyche in such a way as to foster role constraint among mothers caring for young children who also maintain senior-level positions in educational leadership.

The following chapters will explore these complex issues first from a macro level reviewing the historical foundations for mothers working in educational leadership. This review sets the stage for my research and a more intimate portrait of a small group of women who shared their current lived experiences. My interpretation of their stories will be presented first through a fictionalized account crafted through an analysis taken directly from interview transcripts and second through a more conventional thematic discussion of the findings. Included throughout these chapters will be conversations regarding both theoretical and methodological perspectives that informed my decisions from the onset of this dissertation research to the final analysis.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE – THE MATERNAL WALL

### Introduction

While the field of education is heavily populated by women today, this has not always been the case. What has remained consistent is the lack of women in educational leadership positions. The purpose of this literature review is to provide an historical context for the conditions faced by women who currently serve in senior-level educational leadership positions (i.e., at least 50% of job responsibilities include administration and supervision). Specifically, I will explore the historical predominance of males in all levels of education and the “safe bastion” created for men in the area of educational administration (Blount, 1998). I will address a primary concern implicated in the uneven gender distribution of mothers in top administrative positions: what Williams (2000) called “The Maternal Wall” (p.69).

Throughout my review of previous scholarship on the underrepresentation of women in positions of educational leadership, I noticed reoccurring themes. Women frequently point to challenges of balancing the roles of both mother and educational leader. These women often cite the importance of not letting *their* care of their spouse and children suffer because of the demands of a job (Blount, 1998; Grogan, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1987). This seems to be an important correlate to both female moral development theory (Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1996) and sociological considerations of domesticity (Williams, 2000). Due to my interest in these possible connections, the second portion of this literature review considers these correlates in the pockets of literature on the history

of women in education and domestic implications in role constraint. I believe these areas of research contribute to a foundation for exploring how women maintain the dual roles as mothers of young children and upper level educational leaders.

### Historical Overview of Women in Education

Currently in the United States, women earn approximately 49% of all doctoral degrees and 67% of doctoral degrees in education (National Science Foundation, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). This is a significant increase from 1920 when women earned only about 10% of all doctoral degrees awarded in the United States and only 16% of the doctoral degrees conferred in education (Woodhouse, 1928; National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). The average age for women to earn a doctoral degree in education, 43 years, is significantly higher than the average of 34 years for women across all disciplines. The time span between earning a bachelor's degree and completing a doctoral degree in education is 17.3 years, one of the longest spans for any field, and generally attributed to the number of individuals who work full-time in the field before returning for a graduate degree and those individuals who work while pursuing a graduate education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

Today, roughly 29% of community college presidents (June, 2007), 18% of K-12 superintendents (Grogan & Bruner, 2005), and 21% of four-year college presidents are women (June, 2007). Women certainly have the educational preparation to move into any of these positions earning doctoral degrees at increasingly higher rates yet men still occupy the vast percentage of these appointments (Amedy, 1999; Grogan, 1996; Glass, 1992; National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). From 1976 to 1995 there was a 50% increase in the numbers of women working in postsecondary education but women still occupy less than 27% of the full professorship positions, a necessary prerequisite for



progressing into many postsecondary leadership positions (Berryman-Fink, Lemaster, & Nelson, 2003).

Presently, women make up about 44% of educational administration positions across both spheres of higher education and K-12 public education. However, this representation is inversely proportional to the level of the leadership position with only scant numbers of women represented at the very top (Gerdes, 2003). From 1950 to 1970 the number of women in superintendent positions in the United States dropped from 10% to 3% with the number rising only slightly to 6% during the 1990s. Although women are increasingly represented in educational administration, they are not breaking through the “glass ceiling” found for the senior most level positions whereas men seem to riding the “glass escalator” to the top. (Blount, 1998; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Williams, 1995).

Modern Western culture has traditionally viewed the field of education as a man’s domain. Young males took advantage of all levels of education and older men ran the schools and universities (Blount, 1998; Ginn, 1989). Education was a sphere in which women were not accepted. Cultures, such as you would find in the United States, that were founded on traditional Protestant beliefs, did not promote female education but rather the indentured nature of women to the home. Men were viewed as the head of the household and ultimately the final decision makers, while educating women was primarily viewed as unessential. While compulsory education was found throughout the American colonies as early as 1655, girls were not included more formally into individual state law until the 1850s (Blount, 1998; Darley, 1976).

Infused throughout Protestant religious beliefs was traditional Western thought originally espoused by the ancient, Greek philosophers. According to Aristotle, “Just as a chair is for sitting and air is for sustaining life, so a woman is for breeding from and

providing for comfort to the male” (Aristotle in Midgley & Hughes, 1983, p.3). A woman’s life was supposed to revolve around the private sphere of home, spouse, and children, none of which would necessitate formal education. Conversely, men functioned primarily in the public sphere of politics, community, and eventually work outside the home. All three domains presupposed some degree of formal education (Giles, 1990).

During the post-Revolutionary period in the United States, primary education was mandated for males in many states. More teachers were needed but few women were hired because females were viewed as less experienced and ultimately less intelligent than their male counterparts (Solomon, 1985). The primary exceptions were in more isolated, rural communities where a female teacher was the only option available. Around 1800 the tide began to turn in the United States and the educational needs of women, at all levels, was beginning to emerge, albeit limited (Blount, 1998). Women were not welcome in many educational institutions. Segregated education was created from the one-room school house to institutions of higher education. Mount Holyoke, founded in 1837, was the first institution of higher education founded to provide women with a welcoming educational environment and to train women as teachers (Lloyd, 1994). Many of these women returned to their communities and set up schools of their own, dubbed “dame schools,” which were looked upon as little more than daycare and considered substandard education (Blount, 1998, p. 14; Schwager, 1988).

Logic would suggest that as society became more comfortable with the notion of women being educated, society should also become more comfortable with women assuming positions as teachers in mainstream schools. Eventually, women were accepted into the classroom but strict societal boundaries were established. These women were generally single and were forced to exit the profession if they decided to marry (Blount,

progressing into many postsecondary leadership positions (Berryman-Fink, Lemaster, & Nelson, 2003).

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1998; Harris, Lowery, & Arnold, 2002). Catharine Beecher, an advocate for women in education during the 1800s, indicated that women should be teachers because of their natural tendencies towards care and rapport with children, and she supported the notion that once women married or became pregnant, they would of course leave the profession to care for their spouse and children (Blount, 1998; Hudson & Williamson, 2002; McGrath, 1992). According to Jamieson (1995), this was “to spare children the sight of a pregnant woman” (p. 66).

Teaching became a “feminized profession” by the mid and late 1800s (Blount, 1998, p.21). After the Civil War, men left education in vast numbers just as more and more women began entering the profession. From 1899 to 1906 the number of men in primary education dropped 24% (Tyack, 1974). As more women entered the field, perceived “safe bastions” predominated by men had to be established to entice men back into education. These “safe” havens were coaching, vocational education, science, math, administration, and higher education. This was particularly true for upper administrative positions, like the superintendency and college presidency, which was commonly referred to as “the new, male niche” (Blount, 1998, p. 7). The superintendency became and still is one of “the most male-dominated executive positions of any profession in the United States” (Glass, 1992, p.8) with women currently occupying only 18% of superintendent positions across the United States (Grogan & Bruner, 2005).

By the late 1800s many institutions of higher education had degree programs in educational administration. Unfortunately, most of these educational institutions were closed to women. The few programs that did admit women often exuded a hostile environment so as to promote their eventual exit. Some women did persist and eventually went on to assume top positions in educational leadership. Women were often seen as

ideal candidates for the superintendency because these pioneers were single, cost less to employ and due prevailing notions of the “self-denying nature” of women (Blount, 1998, p.19). Since these women were unmarried and childless they were perceived to have more time to devote to the job than their male counterparts (Blount, 1998; Sklar, 1991). By 1930, women held 11% of all superintendent positions in the United States, only slightly lower than the current rate of 18% (Blount, 1998; Grogan & Bruner, 2005). By accepting and embracing the notion of care of others, women at the turn of the twentieth century were able to gain a foothold into educational administration.

The early to mid 1900s was considered the “golden age” for women in education as more and more women began pouring into K-12 public education. “Sequencing” became common practice whereby women would teach up until about four months into pregnancy and step out of the workforce, only to return after their child reached school age. Female teachers and administrators would repeat this “sequence” every time they became pregnant. The numbers of women in education remained steady through the end of World War II until servicemen began returning home. At this time women were encouraged and often forced to return to the home and unselfishly give up their jobs in education and most other fields to men who were considered the primary wage earners (Blount, 1998; Ginn, 1989).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 attempted to breakdown the inequality women experienced in all workplaces, but the Act did little to change the prevailing attitudes and behaviors (Blount, 1998). It was not until Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act of 1972 was passed that legislation was enacted that carried consequences for educational institutions that did not create a more level playing field for men and women (Evans, 1979). Once this legislation was in place, women began pouring into colleges and

1998; Harris, Lowery, & Arnold, 2002). Catharine Beecher, an advocate for women in education during the 1800s, indicated that women should be teachers because of their natural tendencies towards care and rapport with children, and she supported the notion that once women married or became pregnant, they would of course leave the profession to care for their spouse and children (Blount, 1998; Hudson & Williamson, 2002; McGrath, 1992). According to Jamieson (1995), this was “to spare children the sight of a pregnant woman” (p. 66).

Teaching became a “feminized profession” by the mid and late 1800s (Blount, 1998, p.21). After the Civil War, men left education in vast numbers just as more and more women began entering the profession. From 1899 to 1906 the number of men in primary education dropped 24% (Tyack, 1974). As more women entered the field, perceived “safe bastions” predominated by men had to be established to entice men back into education. These “safe” havens were coaching, vocational education, science, math, administration, and higher education. This was particularly true for upper administrative positions, like the superintendency and college presidency, which was commonly referred to as “the new, male niche” (Blount, 1998, p. 7). The superintendency became and still is one of “the most male-dominated executive positions of any profession in the United States” (Glass, 1992, p.8) with women currently occupying only 18% of superintendent positions across the United States (Grogan & Bruner, 2005).

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educational administration programs (Blount, 1998). The practice of sequencing now became a personal choice, albeit with possible societal influence, rather than an institutionalized practice. Women began to limit their own options due to personal beliefs that family needs should come first (Jamiesen, 1995) and the perceived incompatibility of raising young children while maintaining a senior level position in educational administration (Harris, Lowery, & Arnold, 2002). Once the structural barriers that stifled women were removed they were quickly replaced by cultural and societal barriers that helped foster role constraint.

### *Childrearing as a Contributing Factor of Role Constraint*

Why are women not occupying the top educational, administrative positions today when women are earning 67% of the doctoral degrees? Research has shown that most women indicate that the demands of the job (i.e., time and energy) are often in conflict with the constraints of family responsibilities (Gerdes, 2003; O'Laughlin & Bischoff, 2001; Watkins, Herrin, & McDonald, 1998). Many women work full-time and then come home to a second shift of housework and childcare (Hochschild, 1989; Williams, 2000). Men contribute more today to childcare and housework than in previous generations, but women still absorb the majority of the work, creating role strain that many women feel is far too great to maintain (Bhalalusesa, 1998; Blount, 1998; Darley, 1976; Marshall, 1998).

Some of the tensions that professional women report are dealing with housework, maintaining relationships, and fear of failing as a mother (Grogan, 1996; Harris, Lowery, & Arnold, 2002; Jamiesen, 1995). In popular media, women are depicted in family settings involving home and children, but very few depictions blend the role of childrearing and the office (Denzin, 1993; Fels, 2004; Grogan, 1996). Society suggests

that women are not “good/ideal mothers” unless all their time and energy is devoted to their children, and women who go into educational administration hear this message loud and clear (Darley, 1976; Guendouzi, 2006). Grogan (1996) sites a conversation with an aspiring female superintendent:

It was terrible, and my advice now to principal trainers.... to administrative interns who are in the principal program, if they have young children, is to wait. Because I think it just tears you apart in terms of trying to commit to both, and I think something suffers; either the job suffers, or the family suffers, so I found that to be extremely challenging, and if I was to do it again, I wouldn't do it. I would devote my time to my children (p. 113).

The respondent suggested that her decision making should revolve around the needs or care of others (i.e., her children and family), exemplifying both the popular notions of female moral development and domesticity.

Society puts a great deal of pressure upon mothers to be “superwomen” (Grogan, 1996; Willard, 1998). A remark commonly made to working mothers is “there is no point in having kids if you work” (Sheridan, 1992, p.223). Yet, according to the United States Department of Labor (2006), 77% of women in the workforce working full or part-time have children living in the home under 17 years of age, 64% of those women have children under the age of 6, and 61% have children under the age of 3. Women are expected to balance all responsibilities and let nothing suffer (Grogan, 1996; Sheridan, 1992; Willard, 1998).

According to Burton White (1975), noted authority on early childhood development and author of *The First Three Years*, “no job is more important than raising a child in the first three years” (Willard, 1998, p.225), but at the same time women receive a

conflicting message from the workforce. Managers often indicate, “If you have someone you’re counting on to do the job, your expectations don’t change just because a child has entered the picture” (Willard, 1998, p.225). The expectations of an ideal worker seem incompatible with the expectations of the ideal parent. According to Kramarae (2001) and Marshall (1998), women who have young children experience the greatest impediment to their career and heaviest burden of responsibility. Women with more advanced degrees experience even greater strain and role conflict, likely because their degree of responsibility on the job is higher and they have far fewer role models. The more prestige a job holds (e.g., the superintendent or college president) the greater the role strains (Marshall, 1998).

### *Domesticity*

Why is it that women experience greater role strain when having children seems to aid males in their career? Sociological notions of domesticity suggest that a commonly held belief in American society is that “women specialize in family work” (Williams, 2000, p. 3). Our society is set up around this notion thereby creating both work and home settings that put women at a disadvantage in the workplace. In fact most workplace structures are set up around the notion that someone (i.e., a woman) is at home and available to care for the domestic needs of the family. In many respects that perception is actually true. American women currently assume 80% of the childcare responsibilities and 66% of “housework” regardless if they are employed outside the home. Hochschild (1989) calls these women the “18 hour mother” who works incessantly between home and the job.

Shortly before the Industrial Revolution work began to shift away from the family farm to outside employment. Prior to this time the domestic chores of the family and

childcare were more evenly split between both men and women. The type of work women contributed did not define them as inferior because men were often seen engaging in similar activities. Women's inferiority was viewed as being an innate feature of being female. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution and the emerging notion of man as "the breadwinner" (Cowan, 1983; Evans, 2006; Williams, 2000, p.25) the primary focus for women left in the home was childcare. As the notion of the modern day workplace emerged throughout the 1900s it occurred without the input of women.

Initially few women were a part of this emerging phenomena and the male majority set a standard of what we now refer to as "the ideal worker." The "ideal worker," usually male, is available to work when and where he is needed. This is only possible because someone is at home caring for the domestic needs of the family. Embedded in American society is still a common notion that women should be at home to care for the family needs while the father is working and therefore entitled to freedom from contributing to family needs beyond the paycheck. So, from the late 1800s until the 1970s the workplace developed around these notions and institutional structures and workplace practices were defined by these norms (Jacobs & Madden, 2004; Warner, 2005; Williams, 2000).

As more and more women enter the workforce they are bumping up against institutional structures, workplace policy, and informal practices that hold them to higher standards than their male colleagues (Rhode, 2003). Having two parents who are ideal workers leaves no one available to care for the domestic needs of the home, unless the work is absorbed by technology or outsourced to the labor force (Schwartz, 1983). This absence has resulted in Hochschild's (1989) notion of a second shift of work for women. Women who attempt to be ideal workers are typically viewed as being less than ideal parents. This leaves women in a double bind; feeling they let down their families and

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their workplaces. Women experience more job stress than their male counterparts who have equally demanding jobs, most certainly as a result of the added home expectations not typically leveled at men (Jacobs & Madden, 2004). Women have called for more job flexibility in order to continue maintaining the majority of domestic responsibilities. This has led to what is now commonly referred to in the workplace as “the Mommy track.” Educational jobs that typically afford women the flexibility that will also allow for continued maintenance of the home are low paying, offer fewer opportunities for advancement, and require lower levels of education such as public-school teachers or community college instructors (Houston, 2005; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006; Williams, 2000).

“The Mommy track” has become an attractive alternative for millions of women who have “chosen” to step away from full-time jobs that require “the ideal-worker” (Jacobs & Madden, 2004). Do women really want to derail their professional lives? Are women really “choosing” the Mommy track over career goals such as an educational leadership position or do they feel this is the only alternative that allows them to maintain a career, care for their families, and maintain their own sanity? Are mothers withdrawing from the workforce due to unresponsive workplaces and spouses or possibly due to their own beliefs about parenting (Douglas & Michaels, 2004)? According to Williams (2000) the notion of “choice” is nothing more than rhetoric put forth by a very gender-biased society and workplace to justify the supposed “self-imposed” economic marginalization of women. By suggesting that women feel guilty about failing as parents and workers and providing an alternative that *appeases* women’s desires to have professional and family lives, men can continue to dominate the workplace and society, and women feel they have power because they made “the choice.” For women the notion that they are

“choosing” their status is a way to assume some level of power in their own lives rather than to assume sexual discrimination from both society and the workplace. Would women really “choose” to pursue “the Mommy track” if there were alternatives that would allow them to preserve their professional lives, their families, and themselves?

Women who do remain in the more traditional workforce are often seen as selfish because the needs of their families, at times, may have to come second to the job. However, men who work are seen as selfless because their work is seen as contributing to the family. Professional women are commonly looked upon as being poor mothers and women because they defy commonly held beliefs about the nature of women (Williams, 2000). According to famed moral developmental theorist, Carol Gilligan (1982), female moral development is centered around the notions of care of others. So, any woman who does not find caring for her family significantly more important than having a professional career is seen as an anomaly to womanhood (Cowan, 1983; Williams, 2000).

#### *What about Gilligan?*

In the 1980s, Carol Gilligan became one of the most influential voices on the topic of female moral development. Through her book entitled *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (1982), she pushed the boundary of previously held notions of how and why women make moral decisions. The basis for her theory on female moral development was a series of three studies conducted in the mid and late 1970s in reaction to the findings of her mentor, Lawrence Kohlberg. Gilligan (1982) included interviews with questions that she felt addressed issues of self and morality, as well as conflict and choice. She wanted to expand understanding of moral development across the life-span by including groups that were left out of the seminal theories of moral development, namely women (Gilligan, 1982).



Kohlberg (1976) proposed three distinct levels of moral development. The first level, the preconventional, is instinctual and focused on individual needs. The conventional level moves the individual to a stage of morality that emphasizes adherence to shared norms and values established for the good of groups, communities, and relationships. The final postconventional stage recognizes universal ethical standards that may take precedence over the shared norms of the groups from the previous level. The emphasis at this stage is separation and individuation with little priority given to relationships (Gilligan, 1982). In attempts to apply Kohlberg's scale to women and other groups not included in the research, these groups rarely reach the final stage, most notably women (Edwards, 1975; Holstein, 1976; Simpson, 1974).

Gilligan (1982) preferred to view women's moral development as a struggle to connect in relationships as opposed to Kohlberg's (1976) stance that women have a problem with separation and the development of individuation. When women were asked to define what the term morality means to them, one of Gilligan's study respondents indicated, "the constant tension between being part of something larger and sort of a self-contained entity" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 57). This individual viewed tension as a sign of moral character and that by promoting relationships no one person would be "left out" of the world (p.62).

Gilligan (1982) looked closely at the verbiage women used to discuss moral dilemmas. She found that women frequently used words like "should, ought, better, right, good, bad, selfish, and responsible" (p. 74). Selfishness and responsibility were discussed by Gilligan as the tension of inequality and interconnection. Gilligan found that women have a difficult time separating the voice of self from the inner voice that considers the needs of others. One participant in the "college student study" expressed these

frustrations when she described her mother: “She doesn’t care if she hurts herself. In hurting herself, she only hurts the people very close to her” (Gilligan, 1982, p.54). Even though Gilligan points to this description as an example of where women should strive for themselves, she only seems to further reinforce the notion of care of others by suggesting that women should not hurt themselves because of how the hurt will impact others.

Some of Gilligan’s study respondents used similar language when describing their career aspirations. One woman indicated she wanted to be “a scientist who takes care of the world” (Gilligan, 1982, p.55). Gilligan (1982) felt statements like these epitomize the ethic of care many women express when making decisions as opposed to the ethic of justice more frequently assumed by men that emphasizes equality (Kohlberg, 1976).

Kaminer (1993) suggests that Gilligan’s (1982) theory is often central to theories of feminism. Has this theory really contributed to achieving feminist goals of equality? Kaminer (1993) would suggest no. She believes because Gilligan emphasizes that most women view the world from a notion of care, which therefore predisposes women to overwork themselves. Women work double shifts in and out of the home. Since women are traditionally thought to be better or more natural caregivers, and since many have come to believe this perception, they are less likely to challenge sexist cultural traditions. Are women more natural caregivers, or is this just cultural and patriarchal control of women? As seen prior to the Industrial Revolution the care of children was not solely relegated to women; so is care a gendered assignment as opposed to an intrinsic or biological need for women (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1997; Williams, 2000)?

Carol Gilligan’s (1982) moral developmental framework certainly provides a basis from which perceptions of women’s life choices can be filtered. However, this theory has

limitations that may skew how these life choices are viewed, especially for those women that attempt to blend home, family, and career trajectories more commonly traversed by males. First, Gilligan's notion of tensions supports an either/or phenomena (Oberman & Josselson, 1996). Gilligan would suggest that women view their lives and choices as an either/or response that may or may not be the right decision. But are life decisions that simple? Could this perception contribute to why some women perceive the roles of motherhood and educational leadership as being separate, incompatible entities; rather than as part of a Gestalt or a whole (Grogan, 1996)? These polarizing viewpoints treat women as either saint or destroyer and their lives either ones of joy or misery (Oberman & Josselson, 1996). How do women maneuver through such a theoretical landmine without finding themselves always cautious and afraid to make a misstep?

Applying Gilligan's (1982) theory to a conceptualization of mothers who are also educational leaders may present a simplistic and polarizing view of the intersection of these roles. Kaminer (1993) indicated that women may believe they are better at being the primary caregiver and caretaker of others because of the reinforcement they have received from feminist perspectives that embrace Gilligan's theory. Has the influence of Gilligan's theory contributed to the double shifts of home and work that women maintain (Hochschild, 1989)? The liberation that Gilligan's theory was supposed to achieve may have only led to the ultimate overwork and sacrifice that many professional women encounter today (Kaminer, 1993). Indeed Gilligan's theory could be viewed as serving to "legitimate the same old, oppressive stereotyping" (Williams, 2000, p.185).

Do women view their lives and choices as polarities of joy or misery or could their perceptions be more fluid with a range of emotions co-existing in a paradoxical fusion? According to Oberman and Josselson (1996) women and more specifically mothers

experience emotions across a “matrix of tensions” (p. 344). When women first become mothers they may experience a loss of self. Infants do not view the mother as a separate entity but rather just an extension of self. New mothers often sacrifice their personal identity and unconsciously adapt their view of themselves to align with the infant in a complex emotional interconnection (Piaget, 1929). The workplace functions in much the same way with the “ideal worker” really exhibiting no sense of self, as they are merely an extension of the office. Mothers who work are constantly faced with trying to plan around both the “unpredictability” of children and the ever changing needs of the workplace (Oberman & Josselson, 1996, p.346). This creates a constant pull or tension on the mother’s psyche with a fusion of often “warring emotions” (Oberman & Josselson, 1996, p. 343). Oberman and Josselson (1996) suggest that particularly during the early years of childrearing women sacrifice a clear, differentiated sense of self due to a child’s “intrusion of time and space” (p. 348). Might a similar intrusion from the workplace create a sense of undifferentiation that leaves women struggling to maintain this “paradoxical fusion” of mother and career professional? Why is the woman’s psyche at war? Could it be that her unconscious mind knows maneuvering through both roles will require complete sacrifice of self, both body and mind? Warner (2005) suggests that the tensions that exist between motherhood and work do “violence to mothers, splitting them unnaturally within themselves” (p. 151).

Many of the ideas explored through this literature review presupposed a strong belief in feminist ideals. The notion of the societal marginalization of women informed my research from both a theoretical but also methodological perspective. The upcoming chapter explores the methodology and subsequent challenges of conducting feminist

research that remains true to the women at the heart of the inquiry while upholding a highly politicized and ideological, methodological framework.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS

### Introduction

The purpose of this feminist study was to explore how women, age 30 – 55, maintain dual roles as mothers of young children and upper level educational leaders (i.e., at least 50% of their job responsibilities include administration and supervision) in public schools, community colleges, and universities. While taking a feminist perspective, my goal was to examine the emotional and career impacts for women who are both mothers and educational leaders. More specifically, my goal was to keep the research focused around the lives of the women I interviewed and bringing to light possible societal barriers and perceptions that contribute to inequality for women (Reinharz, 1992).

My previous experience with research was almost entirely positivist in nature. I was briefly exposed to more interpretivist methodology through an undergraduate ethnographic writing class. Even though I was immersed in quantitative research throughout my undergraduate and master's education, I always remembered the ethnography class with great fondness and desired to become more knowledgeable about the traditions and practices of qualitative inquiry. When I began considering topics for my dissertation I immediately thought back to this class and the power it held for me. The five years that had passed between completing a master's degree and beginning a doctoral program included such major life events as marriage and the birth of my first child. In reflecting upon my personal growth I also sensed subsequent growth as a researcher and no longer felt comfortable with the descriptions that quantitative research

could provide. The type of data that positivist research produces no longer accurately represents for me the true nature of social science research.

When I settled upon my research topic it became increasingly clear that qualitative methods, specifically feminist research, were beckoning me. I wanted to talk to women about their feelings regarding the dual roles of motherhood and educational leadership. Statistics would not represent for me the depth and richness of individual perceptions and feelings.

Feminist research typically addresses issues that cannot be resolved with an absolute truth, like feelings and perceptions. Rather feminist research is about plurality, suggesting that all human beings have unique experiences that can provide fuller insight into the complexities of life. In most feminist inquiry there is an attempt to remove the power differential between researcher and the subject of the research. According to Spender (1985), “at the core of feminist ideas is the crucial insight that there is no one truth, no one authority, no one objective method which leads to the production of pure knowledge” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 7).

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) suggest that the very nature of feminist studies should promote a woman’s voice. This is often an uncomfortable position for women to be in because “they have little confidence in their own ability to speak” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, p.37). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggest that woman-to-woman conversation is one way to break free from the “oppression” that has made women uncomfortable with their own voices. The purpose of my feminist inquiry was to allow the women to tell their stories in their own words.

The theoretical underpinnings of my inquiry helped inform my decision making surrounding methodology but I found myself with much less defined parameters than in

my previous research experience. I am enthralled with conducting research but I found myself feeling reticent over the notion of settling on any one “type.” I didn’t want to feel that the methodology was driving the research and that the participants could have been replaced by any random person meeting the same demographics. The beauty of interpretivist research is that the unique attributes of each and every participant are allowed to surface and not reduced to some uniform, unrecognizable whole. As I began to consider my methodology I used the experience I gained from a previous pilot study to help maneuver through the specific design decisions for this dissertation.

### Pilot Study

In pilot research conducted almost a year prior to beginning the study presented here, I interviewed three women in senior level educational leadership positions (i.e., at least 50% of their job responsibilities included administration and supervision) in order to better understand the challenges of their jobs while also functioning as mothers to young children. Due to the personal nature of the information needed to reflect upon the questions posed by this study, I elected to use semi-directed interviews. Even during the earlier project it was clear that feminist theory was guiding my decision making. Interviewing is one of the most commonly used research techniques in feminist inquiry as it allows women the opportunity to express their own voices (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). The practice of semi-directed interviews allow the researcher to provide a basic framework from which conversation can proceed while still remaining flexible enough to promote active engagement of the respondents (Reinharz, 1992).

The participants of the pilot study invited me into their places of work, which included a high school, a two-year community college, and a four-year university. Each



of the three women were between 30 and 55 years of age, had children all under the ages of 12, were married to men who also worked full-time, and maintained positions of educational leadership. All interviews were transcribed and coded for issues relevant to the guiding questions of the study. The major themes that emerged were issues of time, pregnancy, support, childcare, domesticity, husband, work behavior, feelings, education, decisions, care of others, and care of self.

I found the women from my pilot study to be very in touch with their emotions and either willing to share these tensions with me and/or able to articulate the conflict they felt as mothers and career professionals. All three devoted significant attention to domesticity and indicated this issue was one of the main challenges they faced in maintaining both roles. Additionally, they all spent significant time discussing feelings of guilt and expressing concern they would fail as either mothers and/or workers. Before leaving this brief discussion of my pilot study and its significance in helping to solidify my dissertation topic, I would like to mention the additional influence the pilot work had on my decisions regarding data collection and representation. The women's expressions of conflicted feelings were conveyed through examples relayed as "stories." The significance of stories became a methodological magnet, one that I seemed somewhat unconsciously drawn to as I progressed from the pilot to the dissertation research.

Prior to actually conducting the pilot study, the prelude for this dissertation was actually some of the first thinking, writing, and analysis I completed towards this project almost four years ago. As I began to think about the topic of motherhood and educational leadership I found myself compelled to begin writing my "story." I found that when I thought about myself as a mother and leader that my mind would automatically proceeded to stories of my dual roles.

I remember very vividly in high school seeing the film *Baby Boom* with Diane Keaton. This motion picture was about a successful, career woman who unexpectedly inherits a child and the challenges she faces reconciling parenthood with her career. The story explores the implications for her career when her new found parenting responsibilities leave her unable and unwilling to be available to the workplace whenever needed and the emotional struggles she faces when she realizes parenting and her job are equally important. The movie concludes with the title character establishing her own successful business that allows her the flexibility to be both mother and career professional. Throughout the remainder of my teenage years and into early adulthood whenever I thought about being a career professional and a mother I thought of *Baby Boom*. Diane Keaton's character found a way to have it all and do it all. I really thought that simply having the desire to be both a mother and professional would erase the challenges as easily as for the character in a Hollywood production. The story conveyed in that film added to the cognitive schema I had begun to develop as a child about working mothers. Upon reflection I found that I was making meaning of my experiences as a mother and educational leader through my stories and even fictional accounts of working mothers. Those stories were my reality and contributed to my identity formation (Polkinghorne, 1996).

Combined with previous pilot work around a topic of deep personal interest, a dissertation design emerged. The themes of tension and the importance of stories to transmit meaning undergirded the subsequent feminist theory and methodology for this research.

### Participant and Site Selection

I originally intended to build upon the research from my pilot study by identifying a public school superintendent, a community college president, and a four-year college/university president or chancellor who was between 30 and 55 years of age, married, and had children younger than 12 years of age to interview for this dissertation. I purposefully established these demographics because I inferred that women between 30 and 55 were most likely to have children in this age range and would have had the time necessary in the educational arena to achieve a significant position of leadership. I felt it important that all the women in the study be either married or with a long-term partner in order to examine the notion that having a spouse or partner can ease the suspected strain many women feel in the dual roles of mother and professional. Finally, I intended to select only mothers who had children under the age of 12 due to the level of direct care and time necessary for this particular age group.

After several months of networking, contacting state and national educational organizations, my search came up empty. I was unable to identify women who met these demographics and was told on more than one occasion that my search was impossible. I was frustrated but in some ways also found this fitting due to the nature of the research and my original notions that few women occupy these dual roles at the highest levels of educational leadership. After concluding that my search was not likely to yield the results I was looking for, I decided to adjust my criteria to include women in senior-level positions of educational leadership (i.e., at least 50% of their job responsibilities include administration and supervision) from each of the three educational domains (i.e., public school, community college, four year college/university).

To identify possible participants for my study I relied upon networking with women I knew throughout the community college, public schools, and universities. This snowball technique successfully secured half of my participants yielding a fairly homogenous group that met my established criteria. I located the remaining participants through e-mail inquiries with female, upper-level administrators at regional institutions in hopes that if they did not fit my demographic they would likely know someone who did. One such case resulted in a referral to woman who was a divorced parent. This individual was most interested in participating in the study and after further reflection I felt her inclusion would broaden the scope of my research and provide an important juxtaposition to the other participants. In addition, variant sampling can provide further strength to any patterns that emerged across participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002).

The six resulting participants included three African-American and three white women. All six women were, or had been in the case of the divorced parent, part of a heterosexual marriage. These demographics were the natural result of networking but I did not actively seek to exclude a participant upon the basis of their race and/or sexual orientation.

Table I

*Participant Demographics*

Alias	Age	Number of Children	Race	Job Category	Educational Background
Gabrielle	38	2	African-American	Vice President	EdD
Hope	35	2	White	Department Chair	MBA
Jane	41	2	White	Dean	MA
Madelyn	36	2	White	Dean	MA
Nicole	39	2	African-American	Principal	MA
Sarah	34	1	African-American	Assistant Dean	BA

The informed consent (see Appendix B) provided to each participant prior to the start of the interviews included assurance that their anonymity would be maintained.

Throughout the course of the subsequent interviews and transcription review I was asked by each participant on at least one occasion for reassurance that their identity would remain confidential. Anonymity was extremely important due to the personal nature of the information they shared in the interviews and the level of their respective positions. With this concern in mind, I have elected to present some demographic information about the participants collectively rather than individually, as individual distinction might present an opportunity for anonymity to be compromised.

I requested that each woman choose a site for the interviews that was convenient, comfortable, and afforded a measure of privacy. Each woman subsequently invited me into her place of work and all interviews were conducted in their respective offices. Meeting times varied from person to person and often session to session but were always arranged at the convenience of the participant.

This section continues with brief vignettes designed to introduce the reader to the women who participated in this study.

### *Participants*

The participants of the study were all mothers of children under the age of 12, and their job categories included two deans, an assistant dean, a department chair, a public school principal, and a vice president. Two of the women worked at HBCUs (historically Black colleges or universities) and two were from women's colleges. I was questioned on more than one occasion about the measures that would be in place to protect their anonymity. I felt it important that each woman feel comfortable that the information she shared would in no way compromise her identity. Three of the participants in particular

voiced concern about this issue on multiple occasions. Upon reflection this concern raised a flag of suspicion for me. Clearly the women felt that having their comments publicly linked to their name held some risk, a curiosity I discuss further in chapter 5.

In the year following the conclusion of our interviews I kept in e-mail contact with all six women. I would check-in occasionally just to say hi but at other times to gauge their availability to review transcripts. As I began the process of writing a description for each participant I knew that I needed to devise a technique for assigning a pseudonym to each. I talked with my committee about possibilities and ultimately chose to borrow a technique one committee member used for her dissertation. Subsequently, I contacted each woman and asked that she chose her own pseudonym. Some of the women elected to choose both first and last names, while others elected to go by only a singular first name.

### *Sarah*

Throughout the research process Sarah Baker was one of my most enthusiastic participants. When I contacted her about coming up with her pseudonym for the dissertation she responded, “Wow, cool, I get to choose my own alias,” and her resulting pseudonym was a composite of family names. Sarah was initially referred to me by a colleague who thought she might fit my participant demographics. I contacted Sarah by e-mail to see if that was indeed the case and to find out if she would be interested. Sarah responded almost immediately with great excitement. To my initial dismay, I found that Sarah was a single mother and at the onset on my study I planned to only look at women who were married or in partnerships. Sarah was so enthusiastic about participating I reconsidered my original decision to only include women with partners. I felt her story

would bring a unique perspective to the research and add an additional layer of richness to the data.

At the time, Sarah was a thirty-four year old African American. She had a seven year old child from a previous marriage and was currently single. She wasn't dating anyone but "was looking." During the time of our interviews Sarah purchased her first home. The move eliminated what had been roughly a 30 minute commute to and from work each day but also meant that Sarah's mother, and other immediate relatives, no longer lived in close proximity. Sarah and her son had a close relationship with her mother, and Sarah relied upon her for assistance with childcare, particularly on evenings when she was in class.

Sarah was an assistant dean within an academic services unit at her institution. She had a bachelor's degree in accounting and was pursuing a master's degree towards an eventual CPA licensure, which would allow her to continue her progression through the financial services sector of her institution. She attended class two nights a week at an institution close to her mother but about 30 minutes from her new home and job. Sarah had not discounted eventually pursuing a doctoral degree in higher education administration but was squarely focused on completing the master's program at that time.

### *Hope*

Hope Pearce was a Caucasian female, with a bachelor's degree in music and an MBA. She was thirty-five years old at the time of our interviews and had two children: an 11 year old from her first marriage and a one year old from her current marriage. Hope was a colleague who also led an academic department but someone I didn't know well. Prior to our interviews I had only a couple of brief conversations with her. When I approached Hope about participating she accepted the invitation with no hesitation.

Hope was happily married to her second husband, a computer-programmer who also worked full-time. Their one-year-old attended an onsite daycare at her spouse's place of work. Hope had only worked in education full-time for about six years, prior to which she held positions in the corporate world that typically required 60 hour work weeks. When Hope decided to make the transition to education she took a significant cut in pay but felt completely comfortable with the tradeoff because the salary was more than counterbalanced by the flexibility in schedule and improved quality of family life. She expressed no regrets about altering her career path.

The alias Hope chose was an interesting juxtaposition between her home and work life. The name Hope comes from what she describes as her positive outlook on life. Additionally, Hope spends a great deal of time at the office and often jokes that she spends so much time there that she has both a home husband and an office husband. Her "office husband" is her program coordinator and the colleague that she works most closely with. This colleague's last name is Pearce, thus her name Hope Pearce.

### *Madelyn*

I met Madelyn a couple of years into my doctoral studies while taking a course at another institution for transfer credit. Madelyn was also taking a few courses in the doctoral program at this institution until she was officially admitted into the program. We got to know each other during this time and had stayed in contact professionally. I remembered that Madelyn had children a little older than mine from these earlier conversations. Madelyn was very eager to participate and we both welcomed the opportunity to get to know each other better. Madelyn chose her alias because she found the sound of the name lyrical.



Madelyn was Caucasian, thirty-six years old, and the mother of two. It was important to her and her husband that someone would be at home with their children until they reached school-age. Prior to the birth of their first child they made the decision that her husband would become a stay-at-home parent since Madelyn earned more money. Their children were seven and four at the time of the interviews, and her husband was making plans to return to the workforce the next year when their youngest child entered kindergarten.

Madelyn had a bachelor's degree and master's degree in English, as well as an additional master's in library services. Madelyn was currently enrolled in a doctoral program and was entering her second year of the program. Madelyn had worked in education since 1993, first teaching at a public high school, then a stint working in the public library system, before assuming her position at her current institution as a dean for an academic support services area.

### *Jane*

Jane Mitchell was referred to me by the president of her institution. A colleague suggested that I contact this president as she was most accessible and might be a prime candidate to interview if I decided to conduct retrospective interviews with women who had previously been mothers of young children while serving in a senior level leadership position. Jane was a forty-one year old Caucasian female with two children: the first child was two and a half and the other child six months old at the time of the interviews. She had returned from maternity leave only a couple of months before our interviews began. Jane's husband also worked full time in a professional, managerial position.

Jane had a bachelor's degree in history and a master's degree in educational administration. She had worked in education since her graduation from college in 1987

and was currently a dean of a student services division. Jane was interested in possibly entering a doctoral program but at the time of our interviews indicated that she was unsure of when and if there will be time and opportunity for this pursuit. When I contacted Jane for her alias, she proudly informed me that she had indeed decided to pursue the doctoral degree and was currently applying to regional programs. During one of our conversations Jane compared herself to a rosebud. She said rosebuds are beautiful even if they never reach their full potential by blooming. She thought of herself the same way when contemplating her decision to pursue a doctorate. It was very exciting to learn that Jane was seizing an opportunity that as she stated would “allow her to bloom.” The alias Jane Mitchell was drawn from family names that held significance for her.

### *Nicole*

The fifth participant in my study was Nicole, and she had just entered a doctoral program when we began the interviews. Nicole was thirty-nine and in her words, “primarily of African-American descent.” She had two children, one nine and the other seven. Her husband held a position in an industrial trade and generally worked on third shift from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. Nicole had both a bachelor’s degree and master’s degree in education and was the lone representative from K-12 public education.

I located Nicole by contacting several area school systems. Each school system put me in contact with their area superintendents who in turn referred me to principals, assistant principals, and/or other administrators they felt might meet my demographics. I networked extensively but only Nicole surfaced. Nicole came from one of the five largest school districts in her state and was principal of one of the largest schools in that district.

Nicole seemed to work very hard and was always busy. On the days of our interviews I often waited for her to finish meeting with a parent or teacher and then someone was

usually waiting to see her after I left. In our continued e-mail correspondence since the interviews concluded Nicole often references how busy she is.

Nicole's children both attended the school at which she worked. She tried leaving her oldest child at the elementary school where he was assigned for a year following her promotion to her current assignment but eventually decided it would be better for the family if both children were at her school. Due to her husband's work schedule he was able to assume responsibility for after-school activities, doctor's appointments, and transportation as needed. However, Nicole often had the children with her in the school building until she left each day. On two occasions when I stopped by the school around 5:00 p.m. Nicole was having dinner with her husband and children in her office. Nicole said once that because her family knew how important her job was to her and that they just molded their lives around it. However, her children never seemed far from her thoughts, especially her daughter. Nicole chose her daughter's middle name for her alias. *Gabrielle*

Gabrielle Gibson was a thirty-eight year old African-American mother of two, one child four years old and the other six months of age. She had just returned from maternity leave about a month prior to the start of our interviews. Gabrielle was a vice president of student services at her institution and had worked at some of the top ten universities in the country prior to this appointment. Gabrielle's husband held an equally prestigious appointment at another nationally ranked institution located nearby.

When I asked Gabrielle about choosing an alias she said I could use her own name. I encouraged Gabrielle to choose an alias to maintain consistency with the guidelines I established at the onset of the study as was presented in her informed consent. She relented and chose Gabrielle because that was her name in French class during college

and Gibson which was a family name. Gabrielle was the only participant of my study who was not in school and already possessed a doctoral degree in education, in addition to her bachelor's degree in French and master's degree in education.

I formed a quick bond with Gabrielle and we have remained in frequent contact since our interviews concluded. She often sends me updates on her children. Gabrielle shared with me during our final face-to-face interview that she would be stepping down from her position because her family was relocating for an employment opportunity for her husband. When I inquired about her career plans she indicated that she would be taking some time off to spend with her children. What I didn't know at that time was that there were some concerns about her youngest child. A few months later Gabrielle shared with me that her child had been diagnosed with a hearing impairment and was scheduled to undergo surgery for cochlear implants. Gabrielle is currently focused on helping her daughter rehabilitate and is an advocate in her community for parents with children who are hearing impaired or have other special needs. Gabrielle and I share some of the same struggles and experiences as parents of children with unique challenges.

### *Angie*

Finally, it seems important to also share a little about my personal and professional background as my life has been deeply implicated in and by this research as well. The interview process and subsequent reflection gave me not only pause to analyze the women but also myself and my own family. I was thirty-four years old, married, and the mother of two at the time the interviews were conducted. My children were four and two and attended a preschool about twenty minutes from my job as a department chair in a community college. My degrees include a bachelor's in history and a master's in psychology. Shortly after completing the interviews my family relocated to a larger

metropolitan area for an employment opportunity for my husband, who is a child-and-family therapist. At that time I accepted an administrative position at one of the top private four-year institutions where I remain today. My current job is not a leadership position and I feel at a crossroads in my career with a number of opportunities and trajectories available to me.

My oldest child was about 15 months old when I began my doctoral program and about a month into my studies I learned that I was pregnant with my second child. My daughter is now four and will enter kindergarten next year. My six year old son loves school and loves learning but is currently repeating kindergarten due to struggles as a result of a speech/language delay, diagnosed at age three. My children have never known me as anything other than a mom who works a lot and I am always vigilant to that insight. Regardless of that fact, my children are silly, inquisitive, insightful, and almost always smiling. We are a happy family and I hope that the internal struggles I wrestle with as a mother and career professional have not been so evident to my children.

### Narrative Inquiry

The insight that was gleaned from all the women and their families yielded rich narratives that showcased the details of their lives. Each offered a distinctive perspective into what it means to be a woman, mother, wife, and educational leader.

The methodology of narrative inquiry predisposes that “humans are storytelling organisms” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.2) and that the meaning we make of our lives is socially constructed knowledge created when we are called upon to reflect on our lives. When a researcher engages individuals in conversation (e.g., interviews) the response is often delivered in storied representation. These stories project how an individual

experiences the world or rather how they interrupt how they experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Relationships are central to narrative inquiry as the subject of such scholarship often delves into deep, emotional constructs of meaning. Traditional empiricist data and methods can only describe what is believed to be the visible projections of these deep emotional constructs. Narrative inquiry attempts to breach the surface barrier and guide an individual through the process of constructing meaning from their experiences and feelings. This intimate process requires that scholar and the individual build a relationship and use that relationship as a vehicle to arrive at a place of understanding. Therefore, the researcher becomes as much a subject of the inquiry as the participant (Ellis & Bochner, 2003, p.217). The resulting narratives can really be viewed as a “joint production” between researcher and subject (Bauman, 1986; Briggs, 2002; Tierney, 2002).

Critics of narrative inquiry often question a lack of “truth” and suggest that the socially constructed remembrance of the past is purely fiction. Narrative inquiry has never attempted to recount life events detail for detail (Ellis & Bochner, 2003; Hacking, 1995). What narrative inquiry does rather is to recount how individuals experience life events and the meaning they draw from these events. How an individual experiences an event is their reality even if that reality may be in dispute with “fact.” Adrienne Rich (1978) says it this way: “the story of our lives becomes our lives” (p.34).

The theory espoused in Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (1962) represents a paradigm shift around the notion of truth. Kuhn suggests there is potentially no way of ever really knowing what is a construction of the mind and what is actually an accurate reflection of the outside world. This concern gets at the whole notion of

narrative inquiry. The point isn't to stumble upon some universal, generalized truth. Rather the narrative scholar seeks to engage the reader in an empathetic dialogue where the success of the

narrative rises or falls on its capacity to provoke readers to broaden their horizons, enter empathically into worlds of experience different from their own, and actively engage in dialogue regarding the social and moral implications of the different perspectives and standpoints encountered (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.225).

Frequently in narrative inquiry the scholar's story becomes as much a part of the resulting narrative as those at the core of the inquiry. Empiricists often cite the "intrusion" of the researcher as an impediment to the scholarliness of the research (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997). The critiques seem to suggest that having an emotional investment in one's work automatically disqualifies the research. Don't all researchers, even empiricists, have an emotional investment in their research? The strict guidelines of positivist research methods have been established to guard against the researcher's emotional investment in their work. Narrative inquiry, as with most interpretivist research, includes the participation of the researcher as *a component* of methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Ellis & Bochner, 2003; Tierney, 2002).

A variety of sources can be called upon to produce narrative data. I elected to draw upon in-depth interviews, records generated by the participants of my research, and my own personal narrative to generate a representation of how a select group of women experience life as mothers and educational leaders for a given moment in time. The following discussion provides the particulars of my design decisions and fieldwork techniques.

### *In-Depth Interviews*

In-depth interviews were conducted with each of the six female participants (see Appendix A for a list of the questions and Appendix B for a copy of the informed consent). The opportunity to interview each woman over multiple sessions allowed me to establish a relationship with each and develop a level of trust necessary to delve into their personal lives and discuss emotional issues. Additionally, multiple sessions allowed for elaboration and feedback upon previous conversations producing far richer descriptions than a single extended session (Reinharz, 1992). Semi-structured or open ended interviewing is often used in feminist research and narrative inquiry because it invites active participation and interaction between the scholar and the research subject (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Additionally, this method affords the opportunity for each woman to share her experiences in her own words and as my previous experience with the pilot study suggested the women were likely to respond with “stories” of their experiences (Reinharz, 1992).

This research explored the emotional side of motherhood and educational leadership. What better way to find out how women feel than simply to ask (Reinharz, 1992). This approach was in keeping with feminist traditions as it allowed for women to make meaning through conversation. According to Reinharz (1992), through interviews, “a woman listening with care and caution enables another woman to develop ideas, construct meaning, and use words that say what she means” (p. 24).

The interviews were conducted over four sessions, each lasting approximately an hour in length. The only exception was the final session, which was intended to be the culmination of all the preceding interviews and included the most reflective questions. After conducting the fourth interview with three of the participants and receiving



responses with less depth than expected I wondered if the constraints of the interview may not have provided the time necessary for critical reflection. So, for the three remaining participants I posed the final session questions via e-mail and asked that they send their response in writing, which each woman did within a week of receiving the questions.

I wanted to capture the actual words of each woman, not just the context of their thoughts. In order to capture the precise dialogue of the interviews, I requested permission from each participant to tape record our sessions for later transcription. I found the time involved with transcription to be extensive; approximately three hours to transcribe one hour of interview. After transcribing the first interview session for the six respondents, I subsequently contacted each woman to gauge her feelings regarding my intentions to hire professional transcriptionists to assist me. Only one participant was uncomfortable with the notion, and I assured her that I would continue to transcribe all her interviews. I located two professional medical-transcriptionists with significant experience transcribing interviews for dissertations. I requested that each sign a confidentiality agreement and no details regarding the identity of any of the participants were shared with them. Upon receipt of the transcribed interviews I reviewed each transcript against the audio tape for accuracy. In addition each participant was provided with a complete transcription of all four interview sessions and asked to comment on accuracy and further elaborate on any of their statements.

### *Daily Logs*

After each interview session I reviewed my notes and the audio tapes. Following the second round of interviews I became increasingly aware of the amount of activity each woman was engaged in on a daily basis. As our interviews were geared towards more in-

depth conversations, I felt that it was important to capture a description of their day to day activities.

I requested that each woman keep a log of her activities on a “typical” workday (see Appendix C), including both home and work. The resulting documents were rich in the details of their lives and offered up another kind of story that contributed to the overall gestalt of each woman as she moved between the personal and professional.

### *Personal Narrative*

This dissertation first began with my story and my questions about being a mother and educational leader. My story didn’t end when the research began and in many ways my story became far richer *because of* the research. I kept a personal journal of my experiences as a mother and educational leader during the time period when I was conducting interviews. I also kept reflective notes to myself regarding the interview process (Kolb, 1984). In addition, I used the journal to log actual events and to reflect critically upon the impact these experiences had upon me personally, emotionally, and professionally. I included my thoughts upon how these events were relevant to the issues of motherhood, educational leadership, female moral development, and notions of domesticity. In addition, there were a number of emotionally evocative events that occurred throughout my life that felt particularly relevant to my journey as mother, educational leader, and researcher. These events have been referenced throughout the dissertation and were included as a data source for analysis along with the data produced from interviews (Ellis & Bochner, 2003).

### *Toward Autoethnographic Fiction*

Reinharz (1992) suggests that in feminist research, “finding one’s voice is a crucial process of research and writing” (p. 16). Reinharz (1992) emphasizes that it is not only

responses with less depth than expected I wondered if the constraints of the interview may not have provided the time necessary for critical reflection. So, for the three remaining participants I posed the final session questions via e-mail and asked that they send their response in writing, which each woman did within a week of receiving the questions.

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the subject of research but the investigator who finds their voice. The original source of my questions about the topic of motherhood and educational leadership was from my own experiences. At first I fought the tendency to allow my story to become part of the research. My positivist training had taught me that including my own experience would serve to bias the results. That was the convenient theoretical reason to dismiss my reaction but upon taking a more reflexive stance, I think this was a way to keep my voice silent. I learned in my family that expressing one's self is risky but thinking back to my father and storytelling, I realized he showed me a "safe" way. After considering my notions about voice and storytelling I found myself drawn to the work of Carolyn Ellis, specifically *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography* (2004). What she describes in this text is the perfect combination of storytelling and inclusion of my own voice.

Karl Heider (1975) and David (1979) are often attributed with having made the distinction between autoethnography from other forms of ethnography. Ellis (2004) indicates this methodology is an infusion of not only "self" and "culture" but also "art" and "science" (p. 31). Autoethnography encourages infusion of the researcher at all stages of the investigation, recognizing the contributions of the scholar and the informant to the process (Ellis & Bochner, 2003). Similarly, Sara Evans (1979) identifies the researcher as a "knowledgeable stranger," whose background or connection to the topic of the study allows for a far deeper understanding than someone with no previous personal, knowledge of the inquiry.

A further concern about my inquiry was my ability to translate the richness of the interview data and my voice into a truly "evocative autoethnography." Ellis (2004) refers to an encounter with one of her students and her belief that evocative writing cannot be

taught. She refers to a quote from Stephen King who states, “I don’t believe that writers can be made, either by circumstances or by self-will...The equipment comes with the original package” (Ellis, 2004, p. 98). I wonder instead if evocative writing must be cultivated with practice. Most importantly, I feel being comfortable with one’s self and one’s own voice is crucial. Could I find my voice? I wasn’t sure but I was willing to try. Ellis (2004) says this type of writing requires soul and my soul was ready to speak.

I considered a number of approaches to writing the autoethnography and eventually settled upon fiction. Angrosino (1998) suggests that fiction allows a researcher to present the words and experiences of the participants at the focus of the inquiry without risking the participant’s anonymity. This method not only protects my interviewees’ identity but it would allow me to indulge my desire to find my storytelling voice.

Susan Krieger (1983) pioneered autoethnographic fiction with her breakthrough novel, *The Mirror Dance: Identity in a Women’s Community*. She provided a safe place for the residents to express their voices through her fictionalized account. Krieger (1983) referred to her preference for writing that blends both autobiography and fiction as a way for research to show rather than to tell. According to Reinharz (1992), other feminist researchers credited with using fiction to convey social science research include Harriet Martineau (1839), Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1892), and Zora Neale Hurston (1937).

One of the most radical notions surrounding fictionalized accounts of social science research is the supposed removal of an author as the all knowing authority on the research. Krieger (1983) felt the absence of an authority figure through a fictionalized account brings light to the passive nature of the reader in more traditional modes of presenting research. Alternatively, Holloway (2001) would suggest that even such accounts still place the researcher in the role of authority figure because rarely is a

complete, unedited transcript utilized. Rather, the author includes only selective elements and organizes in such a way as to support particular theoretical perspectives. Regardless, Ellis (2004) warns that those responsible for making policy changes rarely refer to fictional stories for support.

The issue of generalizability is frequently raised as a concern with qualitative research and also fictionalized accounts (Merriam, 2002). My intentions are not to present stories that can necessarily be generalized to a particular group. However, I do feel that women in similar circumstances may be able to find commonalities in their lived experiences (Krieger, 1983; Pope, 1989; Reinhartz, 1992). Firestone (1993) referred to this perspective as case by case transfer or “user generalizability” or transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The upcoming chapter is a fictionalized account written from the first person perspective that reflects my story and the stories of the women who participated in the research. The resulting tale, *The Green Hornet*, is an imaginative rendering based on a composite of all the women’s narratives detailing specific episodes and/or comments that demonstrate the interplay of mother and educational leader. Each participant brought her own unique perspective to the study that richly informed my inquiry. *The Green Hornet* does not include every story or every story exactly as it was relayed to me but rather selective accounts that were constructed to demonstrate my understanding of the salient themes that I believe emerged through the analysis of data.

## CHAPTER 4: THE GREEN HORNET

“Mommy, Mommy, I need you!” The cries persist long enough to rouse me from sleep. I squint at the clock and it’s 3:30 a.m. “Mommy, Mommy” continues as I get up and stagger down the hall to Sofie’s bedroom. “Mommy, there’s a boy in my room.” “Where?” I say. “There, there, behind the door,” Sofie emphatically insists. I pull back the door to reveal - nothing. After failing to console or reassure Sofie she’s off to our bedroom.

CD wakes up momentarily when Sofie climbs over his head to jump into bed. “Is everything okay?” he asks wearily. “Yeah, just a bad dream; she’s fine.” He rolls back over and falls asleep; within moments Sofie joins him. I get up again and carry her back to bed. It is so hard to believe how much she has grown in the last three years.

As I make my way back down the hall I step into Max’s room. My little mole is down deep under the covers so I have to dig through the layers of sheet and blankets to find those cute, dimpled cheeks. We have a big day today, first IEP (Individual Education Plan) meeting. I love him so much and it breaks my heart to see him struggle. I keep encouraging him to say, “I can do it” when so much seems so hard. I have to tell myself the same thing, “I can do it.” Having children is life-complicating.

Back to bed and it is now 4:00 a.m. My mind is racing with thoughts of the day. End of the month is here; I need to write a check for daycare. Today is show-and-share; what can Max take that starts with *S*? Um, I think CD will handle this one when he wakes up. I have so much to do before I leave work for that *dreaded* meeting. What will the teachers



say? Do they see what a great kid Max is beyond how he struggles? What about his future; will he always struggle like this? “Stop thinking and just go to sleep,” I tell myself. About 5:00 a.m. I drift off.

Bzzzz, the alarm goes off, blinking **5:30** in bright red letters. CD groggily rouses and asks, “Wake me up at 6:00?” After emerging from the shower I find that CD is already up and helping Max get dressed. While I am drying my hair Sofie appears and I stop to get her clothes so she can get dressed while I finish. While I am putting on make-up CD calls upstairs to ask what Sofie would like for breakfast, “Oatmeal Daddy.”

When Sofie and I arrive downstairs I find that the boys have ingeniously stumbled upon a toy snake for show-and-share. With the snake safely tucked away in Max’s backpack, it is time to make lunch. I feel like a short order cook, “Max, what do you want? CD, what about you?” Max asks for the usual peanut butter and *no* jelly. “Don’t you want to try something different today? How about a turkey and cheese?” Max declines my offer with a simple, “No thanks Mama, want peanut butter sandwich.” I should push the issue but we are running late and I don’t have time. Okay, peanut butter *no* jelly it is.

“CD what do you want for lunch?”

“Whatever, anything is good,” he replies. Some days I can’t take making one more decision and in a day full of decisions this is one I don’t want to make. “Just tell me what you want, and I will fix it, but don’t ask me to come up with it on my own.”

Lunches and book bags are packed, the kids are finishing breakfast, and CD is heading for the shower. Woops, almost forget my backpack. I need to take articles and writing with me today on the slim chance that I get a free moment to work on *my*

*homework*, maybe at lunch. Oh, that reminds me I need lunch too. Not much time today so maybe a banana and I have a Slimfast® in my desk at work, that'll do.

In a record five minutes the kids brush their teeth and we clean *sweet potatoes* out of their ears. Sofie and I are ready to head out the door while CD finishes getting dressed. "I love you. Have a great day and enjoy the conference."

"I love you too and I'll call you later today when I get there." After giving Max one more kiss, we are out the door.

Sofie's preschool is in the opposite direction of Max's elementary school so we each take one child with us. The preschool is just a few miles from our house and they offer an after-school program that Max attends. It is such a great help to have Max and Sofie waiting at one location after fighting the five o'clock, rush-hour commute.

Sofie is often one of the first kids to arrive at her preschool and frequently one of the last to be picked up. I feel really guilty about that. If only I didn't have such a long commute. I have to leave home by 7:00 a.m. so I can make it to work by 8:00 a.m. She seems happy. I give her a big kiss and hug, "Good-bye sugar, see you this afternoon."

"Bye Mom," she says in that elfin voice and scampers back to the drawing table, my little artist.

As soon as I step outside Sofie's classroom door my pace picks up. I look at my watch and it is 7:20 a.m. I have to get on the road. Hope the traffic isn't bad today. I feel like the soundtrack for my life is this song called *The Green Hornet*. It is fast and harried and sounds like the flight of bumble bee. That's me, always moving, always fast.

Ugh, the traffic is the usual stop and go. At least I can use the time sitting at the light to check my voicemail and return a couple of quick e-mails on the Blackberry®. Not unusual for my colleagues to respond to e-mails and voicemails after 5:30 p.m. when they

know most everyone is out of the office. Okay, well at least I know what to expect when I hit the door. Whew, we're moving again. I pull in the parking lot at 8:00 a.m. on the dot.

Just another busy day! I constantly have people coming by to see me. It seems like as soon as I finish with one meeting there is a student or one of my staff waiting in the lobby to see me. I have become the queen of multi-tasking and manage to get some work done in between appointments. I generally don't have time to think about the kids when I am at work, that is unless someone is sick and then that is all I can think about.

I tell Janice I am going to have lunch at my desk today so I can get caught up on the calls and e-mails I missed while I was meeting. She kindly offers to bring me something from the dining hall but I respond, "No thanks, the Slimfast bar and coffee is going have to do for today. See you tonight." I frequently eat at my desk or try to grab a quick bite from the dining hall. Occasionally, just occasionally, CD and I can meet each other for lunch. It is so nice to just be with each other and to have a moment to ourselves that we don't always talk a lot; we just enjoy being there with each other. Today is one of those all too frequent days when there is no time for lunch. I have too much to do in order to leave for the meeting and it looks like I am going to have to come back tonight for an impromptu event I have been asked to speak at. I get as much done as I can before heading out the door.

I feel like I live in my car sometimes. I don't worry about the time until I get in the car and then I know every mile between work and school and the corresponding time it should take to get there; of course barring the unforeseen car on fire or state trooper hiding behind the overpass ready to flash their lights at an unfortunate mini-van driving mother running late to pick-up her kids.

I arrive at school just in time for the meeting. I take a quick look in the mirror; oh I look tired. I have laugh lines around my eyes that I didn't have six months ago, my dark circles never seem to go away now, and I seem to have more bad hair days than good hair days. My husband tells me I look beautiful, but I just don't feel that way right now. I am doing the best I can but some days the thought of ironing a shirt or even washing a shirt for that matter would just be the final straw.

While I am gathering my purse I see a trim, relaxed looking mom going into the school. I wish I had more time for exercise but I don't know when to fit it in. I recently went shopping for clothes and had moved into a whole other size that I had never experienced before. I like my job. There is just no other life that I can imagine that would be more pleasurable than working on a college campus. But sometimes I feel like it is a little like smoking – pleasurable in the short term but all the while it is damaging my health. Satisfied that I look the best I can I head inside the school.

While waiting in the office for the meeting to begin I see that mom again. She is clearly a “stay-at-home” mom and there to pick up her kids for a dentist appointment. I wonder if she knows how much I envy her at times. I think how wonderful it would have been to be at home with Max and Sofie for everyday and every moment, and maybe Max wouldn't be having the challenges he has now if I had been at home with him.

Do the teachers think I'm not concerned that we have had to leave him crying more days than not. Does he just need more time with me? Could it be that simple? Do the teachers think it is that simple? I have tried to make my presence known in the classroom. I always drive on fieldtrips, and all the kids know I am Max's mom. Oh, the guilt I feel at times and this meeting is just one big reminder. As I watch the mom and her two kids walk out of the office she glances at me for a moment and smiles. There was something

about her smile that makes me wonder, maybe just maybe, she envies me, too. “Mrs. Wright...”

“Yes, hi. Good to see you again Mrs. Kelly.” The teachers arrive and the meeting goes well. Everyone is supportive and most importantly they get what a great kid Max is. We all agree to further testing and will convene again once the results are in. I leave feeling hopeful and optimistic for the first time in a long while. I know we are in for a long haul but I try to reassure myself that Max is going to be okay and there are others out there to help us. He is resilient and strong like me, right?

I have such a peaceful drive to daycare, I think because I am not racing the clock to make it there by 6:00 p.m. The kids are both so excited for me to pick them up early. Since CD is out of town then they have to return to work with me. One of the benefits of being vice president of student services is that I find it makes it much easier for me to involve my kids in many activities on the evenings and weekends. I think it is also a major benefit that I get to expose them to a college campus. Last year I was able to take them to Disney World when the Sungard Conference was in Orlando. If not for my job we would not have been able to afford the trip financially or afford the time away from work.

I try to remind myself of the benefits of working, beyond my own personal fulfillment, everytime one of the kids says, “Mom, do you have another meeting?” I often wonder is it all worth it but do I really have a choice? My family couldn’t make it without my income, and I know that but yet I still feel the weight when it feels like life has about spun out of control. And certainly society also implies that if you don’t stay home with your children then you are not a good Mommie. I think my family knows how important my job is to me and so they are willing for us to mold our lives around my job.

We arrive on campus and Janice has arranged for a couple of students to watch Max and Sofie while I speak at a prospective student and parent's meeting. Earlier that day I reviewed the introduction that the student government president was going to use for me. I always ask that "mother of two" be included in my list of accomplishments. I think it is important for students to see that parenting is a normalized condition of the workplace and to see that the worlds of work and family can co-exist, especially the female students.

A few moments before I step up to the podium, I hear Sofie crying in the adjacent room. Oh no, I am trying to go through what I need to say and all I can think of is rushing to her. For a split second I contemplate bringing her up to the podium with me. There are a number of parents in the audience, they would understand right? NOT! I'm sure they would think if this woman can't take care of her own kids then how can she possibly take care of mine? So, I nix that idea but I do wonder if a man were in my position and his child was on his hip might everyone think how cute and what a committed father.

I often wonder why the rules are different for women. If my husband takes a day off to care for sick kids, his co-workers sing his praises but let me step out of the office for an hour for some kid-related activity and the chatter starts. I am also fairly certain that some person in that audience would think me a terrible mother to be up at the podium rather than at home with my young children. When I need to assume parenting responsibilities then I feel society views me as less committed to my job and because I work then I am a less than committed mother. It just seems women can't get it right no matter what we do.

"Angie, are you ready?"

"Janice would you check on Sofie and tell her I will be there in just a few minutes? Maybe some food would help." After my talk is finished and I have a chance to meet and

greet several of the prospective students and parents, I grab a plate of food for the kids because I realize I didn't tell Janice what they probably would or wouldn't eat. Sofie and Max are soaking up all the attention but are ready to go after they inhale the mac-and-cheese.

"Can we go now Mom?"

"Sure sweetie. Would you help Sofie with her bookbag?" I usually try to leave campus by 5:15 or pick up the kids and meet CD somewhere so they can go home and I can go back to work. Tonight, we're leaving after 8:00 and we still have almost an hour drive home.

Sofie is three years old but in some ways still a baby. She often falls asleep if she rides in the car for more than 20 minutes. I try my best to talk to her and Max so they will stay awake. If Sofie falls asleep now she could be up for hours. "Hey guys, let's sing *The Hippopotamus Song*." After going through a litany of kids songs about five minutes from home I hear Sofie snoring. Its 9:00 p.m. when I pull in the driveway. Max is cranky and ready to go to sleep, his bookbag trailing along behind him on the ground. They both have school-pictures tomorrow and they need a bath but we are all just too tired tonight. If CD were home we could get it done but I just can't force myself or the kids to expend that energy.

I carry Sofie inside and wake her just enough to pee and put on her pajamas. Max changes into his Sponge Bob® pajamas and climbs into bed. I kiss them each good night and head back out to the car to unload book bags and my laptop.

I come inside and let poor Henry out; he's had a long day. After checking the answering machine and going through the mail I unpack book bags. The snake has made his way safely home, along with a couple of worksheets for homework. Luckily, we have

two days for homework so we can get to that tomorrow. Sofie's bag has a wet blanket and pants, must have been an accident at nap time. So, looks like at least one load of laundry tonight before bed. I work on unloading the dishwasher that I ran overnight while the washing machine is running.

Because the kids didn't get a bath tonight they will need one in the morning. I should pack up as much as I can tonight so I will have the extra time in the morning for baths. With CD out of town for the conference I feel like a single parent. How do single parents do it all? I need to get up even earlier so I can get everyone ready, drop both kids off at school, and be to work by 8:00. I love my job. But it feels like our life has about spun out of control. I think the kids know it, too.

Earlier in the week I had to work late as usual and I called home to talk to the kids. The first thing Sofie said when she got on the phone was, "Mom, do you have another meeting?" CD and I know this is so hard but now the kids are getting older and beginning to sense it, too. CD and I barely talk about it. We just keep moving forward because really what choice do we have? The kids are so important to us but so is our work and economically our family lives a lifestyle that just requires two incomes. I don't really have anyone at work to talk to about this. What would they think? Would they think I was incapable of doing my job? I already sense at times that some of my unmarried and/or childless co-workers chatter behind my back because I leave a little early on occasion for school meetings or because I take a day off when the kids are sick while an important deadline is looming.

About 10:00 p.m. I head upstairs. After a quick shower I climb into bed with the laptop and my notes. I need to get some writing done or this dissertation is never going to get finished. I keep reminding myself that one day I will make up for what I have put



myself through; that is if I don't fall out first. I feel like I am overextended both mentally and physically and as much as I fuss and complain about trying to manage work and family, I love my job. I just need to find personal "me time." It would be so great if I could go out occasionally with my friends, maybe go to a spa and get a pedicure, some *grown folk time*. It would be so nice to have a break from having to be something to somebody. What would it feel like to just be me; with the layers of mom, wife, and supervisor peeled away? Who am I in absence of those layers? I don't know if I know anymore. One day there will be time for me, I just keep telling myself that.

Around 11:30 p.m. I give in to my weary eyes and body, time to sleep. As I drift off the sound of *The Green Hornet* is playing in my head.

## CHAPTER 5: RESULTS - SOUNDBITES

### Absences, Suspicion, and the Notion of Validity

From the onset of my research I planned to conduct feminist content analysis.

Reinharz (1992) suggested this method of analysis is appropriate when comparing text and “power/gender relations in society” (p. 163). As I began reviewing about 1100 pages of transcription for thematic responses relevant to the issues of motherhood, educational leadership, notions of care and more specifically themes relevant to the interrelatedness of these issues, noticeable differences began to emerge from what I found in the pilot study. I expected to find some of the same thematic responses that surfaced in the pilot but instead found what seemed to me to be some glaring “omissions.” Most surprising to me were no mention of feelings of guilt and little to no attention to the issues of domesticity. After reviewing the transcripts twice again I found myself struggling to develop cohesive thematic responses that could serve as unifiers. The clearly emergent themes from my pilot study were all but absent and I found myself struggling to make sense of my interview data. Had my interviews “failed” (Nairn, Munro, & Smith, 2005)?

In reaction, I first turned to my participants. In examining the specific demographics of the women I interviewed for the pilot research and the dissertation research I found limited difference, with the exception of Sarah, the only single parent. The settings were static in that each participant from both studies invited me into her place of work and interviews took place in their respective offices. Additionally, the interview questions had essentially remained the same (see Appendix A). I felt a tension around the disconnect

between the pilot study and dissertation interview responses, a tension I was aware of throughout the course of the dissertation interviews.

Referring back to the personal journal I maintained throughout the interview process I found notes to myself challenging some respondent replies. I felt a sense of suspicion that I was being given an edited version of the women's true feelings. How could they not feel a disconnect between their roles as educational leader and mother? How could they not feel guilty? I feel a disconnect and the guilt. Why weren't they telling me what I expected to hear, that is what I was experiencing and what I heard from the women in my pilot study? Was the absence of these thematic responses just as important as what the women actually articulated (Mazzei, 2004)?

Schlant (1999) suggests that the phenomena of absence in art can be quite powerful. She points to the example of a cement sculpture in Berlin memorializing the victims of the Holocaust. In this sculpture, "the figures themselves are nonexistent; it is the surrounding cement that makes their absence visible" (Schlant, 1999, p.1). With a background in psychology I could not help but to relate this notion to Wertheimer's (1925) theory of Gestalt (i.e., "the whole") psychology which suggests that human beings perceive individual sensory events as a cohesive whole. More specifically I related this to Gestalt psychologist Edgar Rubin's (1921) theory of figure-ground. According to Rubin (1921) what viewers perceive depend upon if their focus is on the foreground or what is equally visible in the background. I began to question whether I was missing something glaringly obvious because I was focused on the foreground of the women's interviews.

While researching Ruthellen Josselson's notion of the *Matrix of Tensions*, I stumbled upon another article she wrote on *The Hermeneutics of Faith and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion* (2004). Josselson suggests that meaning can be gleaned not only from what is

said in text but what goes unsaid. I felt this notion held significance for my research. I wanted to explore the “background” content of the interviews through feminist content analysis which “studies both the texts that exist and texts that do not” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 163).

Josselson posed the question: “can we read into text what is not there?” (2004, p.4). This question became my stumbling block. The women I interviewed all seemed on the surface happy and pulled together. They appeared to be maneuvering through the challenges of their job and their families, not without conflict, but without the excessive emotional struggles I was experiencing and the women in the pilot study expressed. Craib (2000) warns one of the dangers of narrative inquiry is that respondents may filter their life stories to only reveal the image they wish to portray and leave out those experiences that raise uncomfortable realizations. At first I was not concerned about myself but about my participants. Did they feel they needed to give me a sanitized version of their life stories? Even if that was the case I knew from my background in psychology if there is an emotional tension there it will be projected outward through behavior or comments (Freud, A. 1933; Freud, S. 1946; Perls, 1947). All I had to do was look.

After considering the notion of the hermeneutics of suspicion and the importance of absence, I revisited the transcripts with the sole purpose of looking specifically for statements in the text that contradicted the happy and pulled together surface images. Ochberg (1996) said, “Interpretation reveals what one [the narrator] might say if only one could speak freely, but we can see this only if we are willing to look beyond what our informants tell us in so many words” (p.98). I needed to listen beyond what they were telling me and look for the clues of warring emotions. I chose to take a Gestalt focus;

listening and contrasting both the comments in the foreground and background (Perls, 1947; Rubin, 1921; Wertheimer, 1925).

Each of my participants expressed how much they loved their jobs and couldn't imagine not working. I love working, too, but I have had thoughts of what it would be like to devote more of my energies to my children. This has never been an option for my family because of finances but if given the opportunity might I have considered cutting back or even stepping out of the workforce, absolutely. I find that I struggle most with these feelings when stressors of being mom and career professional converge.

Gabrielle was one of the most polished and professional women I have ever met. Of all the women I interviewed she and her husband were the most equal in terms of their respective job titles and responsibilities. Gabrielle commuted about two and half hours roundtrip each day to her job. You would never know by looking at her. She was immaculate. She mentioned frequently throughout our interviews how much she loved her job and her ultimate career goal *had been* a college presidency and I could absolutely see Gabrielle in that role.

Gabrielle seemed so pulled together and very positive and upbeat about the struggles she faced but during our third and final face-to-face session she shared some very surprising news. Gabrielle indicated she would be leaving her current position because her husband had received a new job opportunity out of state. When I asked Gabrielle about her professional plans she said she had none. She indicated that she needed to take some time to be with her children. She shared a story about a very hectic day that necessitated she drive home and back to work again, over an hour drive in each direction, with her children in tow for an evening event while her husband was out of town. She said after spending almost five hours in her car that day she realized she loved her job but



“that it [life] had about spun out of control.” That was the one of the few times that I felt Gabrielle allowed me to see her vulnerability and where she expressed a tension between her role as mother and educational leader.

Nicole, the school principal, was clearly a very dedicated professional and took her job seriously. She expressed on more than one occasion that her job was one of the most important things in her life. When I asked Nicole how being a mother and educational leader affected both her personal and professional decisions she responded, “Decisions that I make here first and foremost I make decisions that are in the best interest of kids.” I was confused by the response because I expected to hear the same kinds of replies that I received from the other women that reflected about not only their work life but also their family life. I decided to ask Nicole very pointedly about day to day decisions involving her family that might be impacted by work but I got the same reply. Throughout the course of our interviews Nicole used the reply, “decisions that I make here first and foremost I make decisions that are in the best interest of kids” often. During the interviews I just assumed this was Nicole’s “soundbite” but now I wonder if there was something that was occurring unconsciously for Nicole when she relied upon this statement to articulate her thoughts on motherhood and leadership. I was growing suspicious that the women were reticent to engage in dialogue or uncomfortable articulating the day to day challenges of maintaining their dual roles, not knowingly but unconsciously. I felt they truly believed what they were telling me but I wondered if they were truly seeing themselves. Was an absence of discussion about guilt and domesticity more telling about these notions than direct conversation (Ochberg, 1996; Schlant, 1999)?

These questions and the reflexive tensions they raised for me returned my thinking to my own practices as a researcher. At first, I felt as if my methodology was flawed. Why were these women responding so differently than the women from the pilot study? Although there were limited differences between the women interviewed for both studies I had not considered that there was maybe something different about me. My children were older but still young and my position had changed from an instructor to a department chair between the pilot study and the dissertation. At this point in my analysis I felt I needed to process my reflections with my committee. I spoke with each of them about my concerns for the analysis and why I was not finding themes similar to what I found in the pilot study. One member pointed out a glaringly obvious difference that I was just too close to see. The pilot study was just that a pilot, with no major risks attached. The dissertation held much higher stakes for me and the women I interviewed. The women from the dissertation were aware that their individual responses would eventually be available for public consumption, whereas the pilot study group understood their participation would serve to inform my future research but their individual responses would never be made public. Both the pilot study and dissertation women were eager to participate and always willing to be helpful. The dissertation group included women also pursuing doctoral degrees and they were all well aware of the stake I held in the research which could have created a different perspective from which they approached the interview process, the actual interview questions, and me.

During the time when I conducted the pilot study I was a doctoral student early in the process of simply completing coursework. By the time of the dissertation research I had finished all coursework, an internship, and a qualifying exam. I had to consider the possibility that maybe the women from the dissertation saw me differently than the

women in the pilot study and in contrast maybe I also saw these women differently. I believe that I approached both studies with the same sensitivity and respect for the information that these women shared with me but I was also certainly aware that I had much more invested in the dissertation. Could this knowledge have led me to interact with the women differently? Could my tone and demeanor have been more serious or my body language less open because unconsciously I knew the gravity of what was at stake for me?

I talked at length with my committee about these concerns and the notions of suspicion and silence. Who was I really suspicious of? Was it the women I interviewed or was it *myself*? Could it be that I was only questioning their responses because they deviated from my own feelings? Was I too close to the subject with my own experiences as a mother and educational leader to be able to look at their responses without filtering through my own lens? If I chose to pursue this notion of suspicion what would that mean ethically for my research? How could I possibly “know” what the women really meant to say, and if I attempted to analyze what I perceived as being the unsaid then was I really allowing the women speak for themselves? I was questioned by one of my committee members about attempting to psychoanalyze the women and she reminded me that “You’re not their therapist.” My only answer was to return to the text. “Literature lays bare a people’s dreams and nightmares..... It reveals even where it is silent; its blind spots and absences speak a language stripped of conscious agendas” (Schlant, 1999, p. 3). The “answers” were there, but how would I know my interpretations were valid?

### Validity

Katherine Pope (1989) offers a feminist viewpoint on the notion of validity, and advances the perspective that all human experience is valid. She suggests that feminist



research is validated by the *reader*, not the researcher, when the reader is able to identify her own experiences within the focus of the inquiry. Could I in a sense look upon myself as a reader as well? If I was not finding a connection for myself to the women's words, then would others? Ellis (2004) suggests that validity seeks "verisimilitude" or "a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable and possible" (p. 124). Validity is attained in feminist inquiry when the researcher, the researched, and the reader better understand the world. If I took the women's words as they were would anyone better understand the world? The more I pondered this notion the more suspicious I became of myself and the women and the silences.

My challenge was to make sense of the interview data in such a way as to represent the experiences of the women and yet address the silences emerging from the background. At this point I again felt myself drawn back to the notion of stories. Throughout the interview process I found the women responding to my questions by relaying stories of their lives. In the tradition of anthropologists John Van Maanen (1988) and Margery Wolf (1992) I decided to present the interviews and my subsequent analysis through the use of data stories, commonly used in ethnography. Their work adeptly traversed the challenges of presenting the lives of the people they studied in a meaningful way for their readers. I once again felt compelled to write, to write the women's stories. The issues they chose to address with stories held meaning. Were the women drawing their identity from these stories or were the stories a mere projection of their identity? (Freud, A. 1946; Polkinghorne, 1996). I hoped that by focusing on their stories and writing their stories I would traverse the landscape of my suspicion.

What does storytelling hold for me? As with the focus of my research questions, being drawn to narrative has a connection to my childhood. I grew up in the Appalachian

mountains and storytelling is deeply rooted in my culture. My father is a very smart man but not an “intellectual.” Books never held the same attraction to him that they have for me. One of the few times I remember him reading to me as a child was from a collection of stories called *The Jack Tales*. These stories have been passed down through the generations across the southern Appalachian mountains. Authors like Gail Haley (2001) and Richard Chase (2003) have brought the stories to life for people like me.

Some of my fondest memories as a child were evenings when my father would read *The Jack Tales*. The tales were steeped in adventure and fancy, often rooted in both fiction and non-fiction (Berry, 1997). The main characters were people I could relate to from my community. My father often followed up *The Jack Tales* with stories of his own that had been embellished to pique the interest of a little girl. Those times with my father were the few times I think I really saw and heard who he was. As I began to consider how to write up my data stories I wondered if research can be presented in the same way. But why choose stories?

My family lived in a climate of silence and we were not even comfortable with expressing our true selves to each other. I learned as a child to be suspicious of what people present to the outside world. Why? Because at times I knew I wasn't presenting my true thoughts and feelings to the world and I assumed all families were this way. When I was in kindergarten my mother delivered a stillborn child. The two years that followed that event were difficult for my family. I believe my mother suffered from depression and as per the “mountain way” went untreated and undiscussed (Drake, 2003: Fisher, 1993). I became shy and withdrawn during this period but worked hard at school and did well. I wanted to please, especially my mother.

My father and my siblings all pretended to be what my mother wanted us to be.

Storytelling was a safe way for my father to risk expressing his true self to his children. I now wonder if my sensitivity to the presence of silence and my suspicion is due to these experiences with my family which served to heighten my awareness of the power of what goes unsaid.

This realization about myself as a person makes me wary in my role as researcher and wary of my analysis. I am cautious with people. I don't know that I have ever shown my true self to anyone. I have this underlying fear that if people really knew me then they wouldn't like me and these disclosures would lead people to question my ability to be a leader. Was I suspicious of the women because I am often suspicious or was I suspicious because I could see a little of myself in each of them? This is not to suggest that any of them carry the baggage that I do but rather they feel it necessary to hide parts of themselves so the outside world will like them and believe them to be competent. Or could it be that I was merely counter-transferring my own character traits and anxieties onto these women (Bourdeau, 2000; Giami, 2001, Holloway, 2001). Would my analysis result in a purely egocentric or autobiographical examination of motherhood and educational leadership rather than a rich rendering informed by the lives of the women I interviewed?

### Content Analysis

While in the coding mines and attempting to identify thematic unifiers from the interviews I made note of statements from each woman that felt salient to me. I found so many of their quotes powerful in very understated ways. I often wondered if these women know how beautifully they articulated the struggles that so many professional women face. I have always been a great admirer of simple conversation and so often



people with the most insightful words go silenced or unheard. My goal in constructing *The Green Hornet* was to use as many of these quotes and/or “soundbites” as possible in order to give voice to what I believe is truly meaningful dialogue on this topic.

The coding mines felt deep and dark. It was like the old proverbial needle in a hay stack with my hay stack being almost 1100 pages of transcripts. I read all transcripts completely three times and made notes as I went along. After the first time through I attempted to take those notes and couch them under major unifying themes. I had a page full of topics and way too many themes. It was at this point that I scheduled a phone conference with my chair knowing that her expertise would shed some light into the mines. We talked at length about trying to recharacterize what I was classifying as themes into subcategories of themes. Then we discussed refocusing my efforts on identifying a few, select themes from which these subcategories could emerge. So, I went back to the mines with a brighter light and sharper pick ax. A couple of months later I reemerged completely frustrated and no further along.

In my frustration I turned to writing. I had these grand plans for a timeline and the writing I was going to get done during Christmas vacation. I quickly found that I can't force myself to write. I can force myself to put words down on paper but it doesn't mean there is any quality to those words. I tried to force myself to write a methods and analysis chapter while I was submerged in the coding mines. I felt compelled to write but I couldn't dictate the words.

I had spent so much time with the transcripts that I knew many of the quotes by heart. I wanted to write *The Green Hornet*, not the methods and analysis chapter, so I did.

### *How To Compose A Story*

*The Green Hornet* was created from extensive interview data and documents produced by the women. I used their words to create a composite character which helped aid in promoting user generalizability (Krieger, 1983; Merriam, 2002). Interview data, as well as my journal notes, were analyzed to identify applicable theoretical perspectives, issues relevant to the guiding questions of this study, reoccurring thematic responses, and distinctive perspectives. The composite reflects a narrative analysis that mirrors the experiences at the heart of the research. Krieger (1983) used a similar systematic approach in transforming her interpretation of data into a fictionalized account.

Each participant was asked to review the fictional account and comment on the composite life that was created (i.e., member check). The feedback of each participant was then used to further enhance the story.

The experiences of all the women were presented through a day in my life. I felt closer to the women and to their words when I wrote from this vantage point. However, I understood that by taking this risk some readers might misinterpret the story as my own and question the validity of my analysis. I must admit, the story is my own but it is also the story of Hope, Madelyn, Jane, Nicole, Gabrielle, Sarah and I believe many working mothers.

As I thought about how to best approach writing *The Green Hornet* I found that I could see pieces of myself in each of the women's stories. The question remained from the onset of my pilot study: Was it valid to bring my story in alongside or would my connection to the subject automatically negate the validity of my inclusion? I found that the inclusion of my experiences was at the very heart of narrative inquiry. I prepared my first draft of *The Green Hornet* placing myself in the role of title character but using the

stories of the women to generate the fictionalized account. Upon sharing this draft with my committee, some members found it distracting for the title character to be me. I attempted to explain to each of them that while it was me, it was not me; it was my story but yet not my story. The committee suggested I draft another version written from the third person perspective using a fictional character as the narrator. I attempted to rewrite the story from this perspective but the words just wouldn't flow. It seemed forced and unnatural. I thought deeply about my struggle and why I felt compelled to serve as the title character rather than create a fictional narrator.

During my first interview with Jane she said how excited she was to talk about this topic. She said it was so nice for someone to take interest in her life and to have someone to talk with about her experiences. Sarah shared the same enthusiasm. Her co-workers asked her why she wanted to participate in the study and spend all that time talking about herself? They didn't understand that was actually part of the appeal for her. She wanted to be able to talk with someone about the experiences she had as a single mother and an educational leader. I imagine Jane and Sarah were much like me. I rarely discuss the challenges of maintaining both roles. I just do it. However, I would love to have someone to talk to about it, and not just about the surface level issues. Rather I long for someone who I can discuss the deep emotional tensions I feel. I have come to realize since beginning my pilot study and then during the dissertation research that this is the space I am in and that is why it was important for me to examine this topic. This dissertation was the first time I have reflected deeply on and have been given "permission" (by myself and others) to articulate the tensions I have felt since becoming a mother and while serving as an educational leader at the time of the interviews.



I don't feel a sense of disconnect by allowing my story to intertwine with theirs.

Rather it seems to uphold the true nature of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry supports the inclusion of the scholar's story as part of the research process. Bochner (1994) suggests that narrative inquiry is really more honest about the influence of the scholar in research. I take ownership of my influence in this research and the subsequent influence that is partially reflected in the story. I have been aware of my presence in the research from the onset through to the analysis and that awareness has made me vigilant to how that presence may have impacted the entire research process. After much contemplation and struggle with drafting *The Green Hornet* I went back to my original instinct to write the story from a first person perspective. I decided to embrace the storytelling lineage of my father and my Appalachian forbearers (Berry, 1997) and conflate the identifiers of researcher/self and participants/other.

After sharing the story with my committee and getting their feedback about the first person perspective I went on a defensive strike and wrote a very literal, direct analysis of each line of the story to explicate how each and every scene had originated from the words and stories of the women I interviewed. I cited the direct quotes that were used word for word and made certain to note those scenes that were reflective of more than one woman's story.

After completing this analysis I sent a draft to my chair and made an appointment to talk with her. I was ready to write the results but I was still struggling with themes. I had been so fixated and focused on wading through the deluge of transcripts and focusing on the specific details contained within that I was missing the themes. They were there but I was so busy focusing on the foreground and the specifics that I was missing the gestalt. My chair could see it clearly. She suggested I had already found my themes and

recommended that I try coding *The Green Hornet*. What emerged from this process were a series of “soundbites” that represent the overarching themes of my research.

### *Themes*

In retrospect it is quite astounding that even though the women came from such different backgrounds their stories were so similar. *The Green Hornet* in many ways was simple to construct because the women often echoed one another’s sentiments. I found a number of constructs that I am electing to bind together as subcategories within two overarching themes, that of *sacrifice* and *self-perception*. The remainder of this analysis will serve to explicate these themes in relation to mothers of young children in senior-level positions of educational leadership.

The decision to label the themes *sacrifice* and *self-perception* was not easily reached. I went back and forth for quite sometime struggling with the semantics because of the emotionally laden constructs so often associated with specific words. I was seriously concerned about filtering the women’s words through my grid of experience and understanding. I fought very hard not to use the word guilt as one of the overarching themes. That term is so emotionally laden and carries with it so many preconceived notions. Most importantly that is how I often feel as a mother and I was concerned I was simply projecting my feelings into the words of the women I interviewed (Bourdeau, 2000; Giami, 2001; Holloway, 2001). After all, no one ever used the word guilt and without specific mention I did not feel I could impose my perception onto their words. I feel strongly that the notion of guilt was there during the interviews, the proverbial white elephant in the room. However, due to my personal connection and experience as a mother and educational leader I felt I must be cautious. Therefore, what follows is an



analysis of the themes of *sacrifice* and *self-perception* that is keenly vigilant to the possible intrusion of my role as researcher and also a member of the cohort.

### *Sacrifice*

*"It does burn my wick at both ends" – Sarah*

The notion of sacrifice is closely tied to the societal constructs of mother and educational leader. According to Carol Gilligan's (1982) theory of female moral development women are naturally willing to assume sacrifice in order to maintain the care of others and uphold personal relationships. The workplace expects no lesser degree of sacrifice, particularly for those women who assume leadership roles. In the early stages of women's progression into educational administration their "self-denying nature" made women appealing candidates for some leadership positions, including the superintendency (Blount, 1998, p.19).

Through the course of interviewing Sarah, Nicole, Gabrielle, Jane, Madelyn, and Hope some of the most commonly relayed tales were those of sacrifice, although no one ever gave voice to their tales under that banner. Sacrifice seemed so pervasive that I believe there was no longer a conscious choice but rather a reflexive response that had developed from repeated expectations of both society and self. The areas that I found most commonly sacrificed were: health, both physical and mental; time, through domestic activities and commuting; and finally, work-life balance. Each of these areas will be explored in further detail to help explicate the byproduct of sacrifice evidenced by the women.

### *Health*

*"It is a little like smoking, calming but all the while damaging my health" – Hope*

Miriam Peskowitz (2005) explored the challenges of motherhood both for working and stay-at-home mothers and the oft purported opposition between the two groups commonly labeled the “mommy wars.” Peskowitz (2005) asserted one commonality between the groups was, “When I see mothers, I see tired women” (p. 134). Incessant work has always seemed to be the lot of women. In an excerpt taken from a colonial woman’s diary she states, “A woman’s work is never done, and happy is she who strength holds out to the end of the sun’s rays” (Cowan, 1983, p. 43). The women I interviewed each seemed to have the outlook that their strength would hold out. However, as I expect this was also the case for our colonial sister, work doesn’t end for women when the sun goes down.

Having both the physical and emotional stamina to withstand the challenges of motherhood and educational leadership was given significant attention during my interviews. Everyone seemed to be aware that their health was suffering and were in fact cognizant that their current circumstances (i.e., parenting and working full-time) were probably contributing to their poor health. Diet was a primary concern. Sarah indicated that she was eating too much fast food, but fast food was perceived as an alternative to not eating. Sarah was frequently racing from work to pick up her child, then to the sitter’s house and on to class. Without fast food Sarah felt she just wouldn’t have the opportunity to fit in dinner before class. On two separate occasions following the conclusion of my interviews I dropped by Nicole’s school to deliver or pick-up transcripts and found her having dinner, purchased at KFC®, with her family. Nicole was often working into the evening and I suspect that bringing in fast food was an opportunity for her and her family to squeeze in time together for dinner.

Lunch did not seem to fare much better for anyone. Hope would occasionally go out to lunch with her husband but generally worked right through due to her teaching schedule. As a side note on those instances when she did join her husband for lunch they would often just sit in silence, enjoying each other's company, because this time afforded one of the few opportunities for any solitude.

Generally, lunch was viewed as a time to play catch-up or time to get ahead. Jane indicated if she did have time for lunch she would usually eat at her desk, either something she brought from home or on the rare occasion she would have time to swing by the dining hall to grab something warm to eat. Madelyn and Gabrielle both found that using the lunch hour to work allowed them to leave the office a little earlier each day, thus Madelyn always tried to keep a Slimfast® bar in her desk.

Jane and Gabrielle had both returned to work a short time before our interviews began after each having their second child. They lamented how athletic and physically healthy they were before having children. Each loved to run but due to the demands of job and family they could no longer seem to find the time. A couple of days prior to one of my interview sessions with Gabrielle she had gone shopping with a friend and to her dismay found that even after losing all the weight she put on during pregnancy that she still could not wear the same clothing size she did before having children.

Jane was less concerned about weight but rather just the general state of her physical health and appearance. She had always felt young and in many ways still did but felt that after having children her body aged quickly. Jane struggled with how she looked but tried to reassure herself that she was doing the best she could considering the circumstances.

Madelyn, Jane, Nicole, and Gabrielle each had two children close in age. I do as well and I feel like Jane in that particularly after my second child, my body aged more quickly



and I didn't rebound as completely as after my first. I am 35 and during the past year I was diagnosed with high blood pressure and broke a rib from coughing during a bout of bronchitis. The dark circles under my eyes never seem to go away and I have more wrinkles than I had six months ago. My doctor's professional conclusion; I am a physical mess. I am *only* 35 and this just seems too young for all this but at times I feel invincible, the proverbial superwomen, who can do it all (Grogan, 1996; Willard, 1998). I take my health for granted and just keep pushing through, trying to "hold out to the end of the sun's rays" (Cowan, 1983, p.43).

When I asked the women about things they could do just for themselves, something self-nurturing, the most common responses were related to their health. Gabrielle indicated that her resolution for the upcoming year would be to exercise more, even if not running, at least walking more. Sarah jokingly responded she would find time to do better for herself one day "unless I fall out first."

The impact of maintaining dual roles does appear to begin impacting health as women approach 50 due to the repeated exposure to psychosocial and environmental stressors (Singh & Singh, 2006). The women I interviewed were all in their 30s and early 40s but like Madelyn felt "overextended, mentally and physically." Hope felt as if she was "burning the wick at both ends" but had to just keep going. I got the sense from everyone that they were aware of the physical toll that was being exacted upon their bodies. So why weren't they changing their patterns of behavior. All of the women indicated they were so busy with their jobs, when they weren't working then they were with their families. Hope, Madelyn, Jane, and Gabrielle were all parenting at least one child under the age of 5, meaning the time demands and level of direct care were extensive. My children were 4 and 2 at the time of this study and I found that my physical

health was just something I took for granted and something I felt I could sacrifice in the short-term. I felt selfish to spend time away from my kids for an activity like exercise. I could justify work. I have to do that and it's for my family. But exercise? That can only be for me (Roberts, 2007). It seemed that for the women in my study, and many working mothers, making time for self-nurturing activities is not a priority (Cloak, 2001).

Hope made the statement that "society doesn't view you as a good Mommie unless you stay home with your kids." Hope's comments and similar statements made during the interviews suggest that the women were willing to sacrifice something as important as health so as not to seem self indulgent and to demonstrate their utter devotion to their children in absence of their ability to be involved in intensive parenting. Or could it be that Gilligan (1982) was correct and women are so tied to the care of others, particularly children, that they are unable to separate from that role even to the detriment of their own physical and mental health.

#### *Time*

*"Every hour that you spend here [work] is an hour that you don't spend somewhere else [with family]" – Madelyn*

Work places have been set up around the notion that one parent is available at home to maintain the domestic needs of the family, freeing up the other parent to devote all time and energy to their position in the workforce (Cowan, 1983; Warner, 2005; Williams, 2000). Approximately 57% of married couples find both spouses working and 68% of those couples have children under the age of 18 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006). Meaning, a significant portion of the workforce is not set up around the notion of one partner being available to care for the domestic needs of the family, so how do those needs get addressed? Through what Hochschild (1989) referred to as the "second shift."

For all the women I interviewed, time was a precious commodity and there never seemed to be enough of it for anyone. I asked each woman to keep a log of her activities on a typical workday (see Appendix C). It was amazing to see the amount of domestic activities they completed each morning before even arriving at their workplaces. All of the women typically got up between 5:30 and 6:00 a.m. and hit the ground running. Children were dressed, their lunches and bottles prepared, and then driven to schools and/or daycares. None of the women ever mentioned hiring help to assist with the daily domestic chores of the family, beyond childcare and occasional meals.

What may have seemed like simple decisions became points of contention due to the sheer volume of decisions that the women they were charged with making on any given day. The conversation in *The Green Hornet* about what to make Max and CD for lunch was an example relayed by Gabrielle. During one of our conversations she discussed the impact of forgetting to thaw something for dinner and then the frustration of trying to decide on a food to prepare that the entire family would eat. She referred to frequent use of hotdogs, macaroni, and chicken nuggets for dinner. Gabrielle expressed frustration with being responsible for coming up with their meals and said that one night she told her husband, "just tell me what you want and I will fix it but don't ask me to come up with it on my own." The women's daily logs were full of domestic activities such as these but this was one of the few conversations that occurred during the interviews about the topic of domesticity and any frustrations associated with what might be perceived as typical gender expectations.

Meal preparation wasn't the only responsibility in the evenings; other activities included laundry, reviewing mail, clearing away the dishes, bathing children, assisting with homework, and preparing bookbags, lunches, and/or bottles for the next day. A great



deal of attention was devoted to these activities in their daily logs but again little to no mention was made during the interviews. Maybe the women enjoyed these activities or maybe they just did not think to mention such activities during our conversations.

No one voiced any serious concerns regarding the additional stress that domestic activities can add to parenting and maintaining a senior leadership position (Cowan, 1983; Hochschild, 1989; Williams, 2000). There was almost a nonchalant attitude about domestic activities, just as if it should be assumed that carrying out these chores was just to be expected. This is not to suggest that their husbands were not contributing their labor to the domestic needs of the home but certain comments led me to believe in all likelihood the brunt of this work was being assumed by the women.

Jane elaborated upon her daily log and described her typical nightly routine, which included bathing her children and getting them ready for bed. She added that her husband would often fall asleep in the recliner watching television while she was engaged in this activity. Jane attempted to mitigate how that might have sounded by quickly adding that her husband often picked up the kids and fixed dinner. Jane then explained that she would try to take care of everything else so that her husband could have some time for himself. From our conversations and Jane's daily log it appeared that her husband had this time carved out in the family routine but no such notation was evidenced for Jane.

Madelyn echoed similar sentiment. Her husband was a stay-at-home dad so she indicated when she is home in the evenings and weekends she tries to assume the majority of the domestic and parenting responsibilities because after all her husband had "been with the kids all day." So Madelyn was working all day and then coming home to her second-shift.

Why was there very little dissent voiced about the antiquated gendered notions of women and domesticity? When reflecting upon my own family I am very aware that my husband is a great supporter and contributes significantly to the domestic needs of our home. As I am currently in the midst of the dissertation he is probably doing more than his share of the cleaning and basic upkeep of the home. I still maintain the laundry, cook meals, pay the bills, and deal with the unexpected occurrences that inevitably arise when you have children. In terms of parenting our children I feel like we split the work fairly evenly. Sometimes I take the lead and sometimes he does. However, I often find that I push myself to do more. Before my husband even has the opportunity to take the lead, I just jump in and do the work. I realize there is so much I am not able to do because of the constraints placed on my time due to my job. So activities like being the parent to drive the kids to school, staying up late to make goodie bags, and fretting over what I cook for dinner are a way for me to assuage my guilt for not being able to meet the societal expectations of intensive mothering (Guendouzi, 2006). I can't be that parent who is there for every party or the parent who is there to meet her kids when they get off the bus so I do as much as I can whenever I can, even if that means sacrificing something for myself, like time.

I believe that at times I willingly assume more domestic responsibilities than my husband but maybe the reason I believe this is because of "choice rhetoric" (Williams, 2000). The women I interviewed were all highly intelligent, each holding jobs primarily dominated by men and well aware of the societal inequalities woman face. So then why was it that the issue of domesticity was only lurking in the shadows? Could it be that by trying to still maintain the home as if we don't work full-time that this somehow



demonstrates the devotion and sacrifice we are willing to make to be good mothers or could it be that they simply enjoy these activities?

### *Commuting*

*"So it brought home to me that it has about spun out of control" - Gabrielle*

Professional women are more likely to be part of a dual career couple than are professional men. This means that working women are more likely to face challenges associated with a spouse's career than their male counterparts. In approximately 57% of all marriages both the husband and wife work. When both members of a couple work it can be difficult to meet the respective professional needs of each in the same location (Gerstel & Gross, 1982; Jacobs & Madden, 2004; Wilson, 2000). Commuter marriages, and commuting in general, is becoming more common as more marriages or partnerships become dual earning (Anderson, 1992; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1977)

Commuting has become an all too common phenomena, with the average commute time being 25 minutes each way to and from the office (United States Census Bureau, 2005). Commuting was a common facet of life for many of the women I interviewed. This issue had implications for a number of different areas, such as childcare. The conversation about daycare couched a concern of many of the women, myself included. My daughter Sofie is one of the first and last children at preschool each day, but this is a result of the time that I must spend commuting to and from my job. Jane Mitchell had about a 30 minute commute between home and work and Sarah had about the same commute for the first few months of our interview until she decided to relocate to eliminate the drive. Gabrielle had the longest commute, almost an hour each way, but she had wonderful childcare and felt comfortable with her arrangements. She just disliked the amount of time she was away from her kids. Gabrielle considered moving to the town

where she worked but her husband was not interested in seeking new employment so relocating would have meant he would have been the one making the commute. Gabrielle did not want her children to have to change daycares or in her words to “disrupt” her family so she just felt it was easier for her to make the commute.

During the four months I conducted interviews my family was going through a major transition. My family had planned for many years to relocate to a larger metropolitan area and when a wonderful job opportunity came along for my spouse we seized the chance. The new job was an hour and a half drive, each way, from our home. My husband took the position and worked part-time a few days a week while transitioning away from his previous position. During this time I began looking for new employment and was offered a job shortly after the dissertation interviews concluded. My home was immediately placed on the market but unfortunately had not sold by the time my new job was to begin. Therefore my entire family, children included, commuted at least three hours a day for almost three months. I found a daycare just down the street from my new job and the children traveled with me every day. Even after moving my husband and I still live at least 35 minutes from our jobs but made this choice due to what we believe are superior public schools.

The women that I interviewed who commuted more than fifteen minutes indicated they were willing to make the drive in order to reap the benefits of good school systems, cheaper taxes, or quality of life. However, the average commute of 30 minutes each way created some challenges discussed by several women. One of the most telling episodes in *The Green Hornet* is a compilation of experiences from Jane and Gabrielle. Gabrielle's husband was out of town for a conference and she had to be on campus for a last minute 6:00 p.m. meeting. This meant she had to leave work early, drive an hour home and an

hour back with her children to attend the event and then make the hour drive home again. Because Gabrielle's husband was out of town she was left to do everything at home that evening. Her children had school pictures the next day and needed a bath but everyone was just too tired after the drive. She put the kids to bed and tried to do as much as possible to get ready for the next morning so that she would have time to bathe the kids and get everyone where they needed to be on time and then drive an hour again to work. Within a 24 hour period, Gabrielle had spent approximately six hours on the road traveling between home and work. This episode brought home to Gabrielle that life had "about spun out of control" so when her husband accepted a new job in another state she planned to take some time off and spend it with her children.

What I found so interesting about the notion of commuting is that particularly the women who had the longest commutes were the women in marriages where both partners had professional careers of somewhat equal standing. Again, in thinking back to Gabrielle and Jane both were married to men who also maintained demanding careers yet each of their spouses worked in the towns where they lived. In each of their respective cases, these women had to look to other metro areas in order to enhance their career opportunities. These women were willing to sacrifice what could have been additional free-time in order to pursue their careers without "disrupting" the lives of their families or the careers of their spouses.

#### *Work and family life balance*

*"You make a way." - Madelyn*

The word career can be translated as race course in French (Jacobs & Madden, 2004). For the women I interviewed that comparison would certainly seem appropriate. Hope, Madelyn, Gabrielle and Sarah talked about their thoughts always staying busy, keeping



record of the often mundane tasks they needed to see to at home and work; like keeping track of a child's homework, ironing clothes, thawing out something for dinner, and then work related tasks. There seemed to be little sense of balance for everyone. Hope and I talked about knowing exactly how long it takes to get between home, work and/or daycare and feeling pressured by the clock. Gabrielle talked about her concerns with having such a long commute if she needed to get to her children in a hurry or if the major highway running between her work and home was congested. However, some women seized opportunities, such as while driving, to multitask. Jane provided the example reflected in *The Green Hornet* of checking phone messages on her way into work. When I took my new position I was greeted by a mandatory companion; a Blackberry®, which keeps me in constant contact with the office. I use time at the only stoplight I encounter on the way to work to check my blackberry if I forget to review any messages from the preceding evening. Jane indicated a number of her colleagues wait until everyone leaves at 5:00 to return telephone calls. Due to this culture she frequently comes into work facing a number of telephone calls. Jane reports she has found it more time efficient to use the 30 minute commute to listen to her messages and respond to those less complicated calls.

Days were filled with duties at both home and work and for those also pursuing additional education there was even more demands upon their time. Madelyn relayed a conversation with her husband where they discussed the possibility that she should drop out of the doctoral program because the strains on their family life were just too much. Madelyn considered making this decision because she didn't want to adversely affect her family. Ultimately, she decided to stay with the program by approaching her work habits differently. Madelyn had a conversation with her supervisor about struggling to work

full-time, pursue a doctoral degree, and maintain quality family life. This same supervisor had encouraged her to pursue a doctoral degree and subsequent to this conversation suggested she bring school assignments to work and block out time each day to devote to her studies. Madelyn said her supervisor saw pursuing the doctoral degree as part of her professional development and something that would contribute to the betterment of their college.

I found that most of the women concluded their night with time on the laptop. Half of the women were enrolled in graduate or doctoral programs. Madelyn, Nicole, and Sarah each noted on their daily log that the last activity of the day was time on the laptop to complete a school assignment. Each pointed out during our discussions about their educational pursuits that they attempted as much as possible to work late in the evening or early in the morning so as not to take away from time with their children. The others referenced bringing work home but that was one of the drawbacks they accepted to have some measure of flexibility in their jobs. Their days generally ended in sleep between 10:00 p.m. and 12:00 midnight.

I believe the women I interviewed did have a balance between home and work, but it was an equal balance of high expectations. Each of the women mentioned how hard they tried to make sure they were doing enough for their children and their daily logs certainly seemed to attest to the devotion to maintaining the domestic needs of the home.

Hochschild (1997) believes the current generation of career professionals are still mired in the traditional views of male and female roles within society. Women are still expected to be the primary caregivers, maintain immaculate homes, and their professional lives are seen as supplemental and secondary to their husbands (Cowan, 1983; Williams, 2000).

The issue of work-life balance is seen primarily as a woman's concern, not even coming

to the forefront until women entered the workforce in significant numbers and these pioneering women bumped up against the challenges of maintaining multiple roles. Because men rarely take advantage of work-life policies established within organizations, the issue is still seen as really only a woman's problem, thereby supporting the notion that women should be primarily responsible for the domestic needs of the family even though their professional expectations are often greater or at least equal to that of their spouse (Rhode, 2003; Valian, 1998).

### *Self-Perception*

Oberman & Josselson (1996) suggest that women often sacrifice their personal identity to their children, particularly in the early years. If that is indeed the case then for those women who are also trying to maintain demanding careers the notion that they are not fulfilling their role as mother strikes at the very core of self-perception. Warner (2005) wondered if the tensions that mothers experience can lead to perceptual distortions creating "mother image problems" similar to what women experience with "body image problems" (p. 158). The theme of self-perception is multifaceted and fed by a number of sources. The women I interviewed reported concern about how society viewed them as mothers, how co-workers viewed them in the workplace, and finally how their children viewed them. Each area impacted how the women perceived themselves as mothers, professionals, and I would suggest as individuals. The resulting perception could lead an outside observer to interpret that the role of motherhood and leadership are incompatible.

### *Societal perceptions*

*"Girls have a hard life." – Madelyn*

I attended a panel discussion at my university regarding the challenges of combining an academic career with motherhood. The discussion centered upon very practical



concerns like family-friendly work policy, stopping the tenure clock, finding childcare, and spousal support. Throughout the discussion there was little to no mention of feelings. However, at the conclusion of the session the panelists were asked to share their own personal words of wisdom. Each referred directly to guilt and suggested that women should not feel guilty about the decisions they make in regards to maintaining a career and motherhood. I felt like the conversation of guilt is one that women are often hesitant to engage in, particularly women who have more to risk due to demanding professional careers. But the issue is always there – always looming. The silence that surrounds guilt is often deafening (Mazzei, 2004; Schlant, 1999).

None of the women I interviewed ever used the word “guilt” when we discussed the implications of parenting while maintaining a senior leadership position. However, many of their stories might have suggested otherwise. Madelyn and Hope both seemed to express emotions of guilt regarding struggles their children were having at school, but neither of them ever articulated the feelings by directly stating they felt *guilty*.

In *The Green Hornet* there are two scenes devoted to Max and his learning challenges. Max’s story is partly my own; but also a compilation of concerns expressed by Hope and Madelyn. Each seemed to ponder if somehow their work may have contributed to problems their children were experiencing. My son Max has shown signs of developmental delay since about two years of age, and I have often wondered if there was something about the childcare we relied upon during these early years that may have contributed to these issues. Specifically, I have wondered if I had been a stay-at-home parent would he be having these same difficulties. During the time in which I was writing *The Green Hornet* Max entered kindergarten and we were in the process of working with the school to develop his first Individual Education Plan (IEP).

Madelyn's daughter had just started kindergarten when our interviews began, and they were finding the adjustment challenging. Madelyn's husband was a stay-at-home dad and their daughter spent very little time away from him before starting school. Madelyn discussed the conflict she experienced each day as she left her daughter crying at school. She felt that her daughter would eventually settle in but she just needed the time to adjust. She was concerned that school personnel questioned her parenting and level of care because she wasn't demonstratively alarmed. The situation did trouble her deeply but she felt everyone just needed to be patient with her daughter.

Hope often referenced, "Society sends out the message that you are not a good Mommie unless you stay home." She never once stated directly that she felt conflicted, frustrated, or guilty about working. There was only this indirect mention that made me wonder if she was indeed struggling with some of those feelings. The school scene of internal dialogue from *The Green Hornet* regarding feelings of guilt were mine but also what I perceived to be the possible internal dialogue that Hope was engaging in and projected through her reference to societal perceptions.

Societal perceptions have in many ways changed little for the current generation of women (Hochschild, 1989; Valian, 1998; Williams, 2000). Women are expected to be impervious if they enter the workforce and have children (Grogan, 1996; Willard, 1998) but are marginalized because they voice the tensions that often exist between those worlds (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Oberman & Josselson, 1996; Williams, 2000).

Jane shared an incident in her life that demonstrated the tensions she often feels. She was called back to campus one evening to speak at an event but her husband was out of town and she had no family around to help her. She was able to arrange for students to watch her children and just as she was about to step up to the podium her daughter began



to cry. Jane contemplated holding her daughter during the speech but felt the parents in the audience might be thinking, "If this woman can't take care of her own kids, how can she take care of mine." When we processed this incident further Jane pondered if a man in a similar position would have felt the same way and if maybe he would have actually been perceived more favorably if he carried his child to the podium.

Sarah faced additional challenges as a single-parent but echoed the sentiment that there appears to be a different standard by which male involvement in parenting and balancing family life with work is viewed by society. Her experiences led her to believe that "when a woman is trying to achieve balance then she is slacking somewhere" but a man is just being a good father. I wondered if Nicole possibly feared that others had this perception of her. She frequently responded with the remark "decisions I make here first and foremost I make decisions that are in the best interest of kids" even when asked about home-life decisions. Everyone but Nicole brought up the issue of societal perceptions throughout the course of the interviews. Nicole's omission could have been a signal that she wished to be viewed in a certain light, and one might possibly interpret from that omission that her conflict with this issue may have been the greatest (Mazzei, 2004; Schlant, 1999).

### *Co-worker perceptions*

*"No one had a baby here as long as any could remember." - Gabrielle*

All the women appeared to be committed professionals that loved their jobs but were concerned about how they were perceived by their co-workers. Madelyn said at times she felt "not adequate" as a mother, based upon societal standards, because of the demands of her job but yet echoed Hope's concerns that co-workers "have given me the impression that I'm not 100% committed to my job" because of family responsibilities.

Gabrielle and Jane took two very different approaches when it came to introducing their additional role as mother into their workplace. Gabrielle was the first person to be pregnant at her school in at least a decade. She asked that when she was introduced for speaking engagements on campus to be sure that mother of two was listed among her accomplishments. She felt that it was important for the students at her college to see women in senior level positions can also be parents. Jane also challenged the double standard that seem to exist in society for men and women who work full-time and are parents. But interestingly when we discussed how she thinks her co-workers perceive her, she indicated, "I am probably more like a male model, I'm very separate here. I don't think about my children during the day unless they're sick or something." Jane also indicated she never talks to her husband when she is at work, she tries very hard to separate the spheres of home and work, except on rare occasions as relayed in her story above.

#### *Children's perceptions*

*"My family knows how important my job is to me and so we have just molded our lives around my job" - Nicole*

All the women relayed at least one incident where their children had asked, "Mom, do you have another meeting?" Gabrielle, who commuted at least two hours every day for her job, discussed a particularly busy time shortly after beginning her current job that required her husband handle more of the childcare. During a weekend that occurred within this busy time one of Gabrielle's children fell down and rather than running to Gabrielle the child ran to Gabrielle's husband. Gabrielle was glad that her children were so close to their dad but it hurt her deeply that in that instant the child did not go to her for comfort. Gabrielle felt her daughter's reaction was a direct result of giving so much

time to her job. However, she also realized that she was new to her position and needed to establish herself, particularly because she did have children.

Jane said that when she is at work she gives 110%, which seemed to be a common remark from all the women. Nicole talked about giving everything she had to her job and said her family was willing to “mold their lives around her job” because they knew how important it was to her. She found it hard to even break away when she was on vacation and would check in at work frequently.

Even though work presented challenges and at times had disadvantages, some of the women relished in the benefits. Madelyn, Gabrielle, and Sarah expressed first that working was not an option but rather a necessity for their family. Gabrielle said her family “required two incomes” and Madelyn’s husband became a stay at home dad based on her income. Sarah was the only single parent, which of course eliminated the “option” to work or not to work. She found her job was actually an asset for her son. She felt proud that he was able to frequent a college campus and that a college lifestyle was becoming normalized for him. She also liked that when he was on campus he was able to see positive African-American male role models. In addition, Sarah’s job allowed her to travel with her son to places they might not be able to afford otherwise. She provided the example of visiting Disney World the previous year when she traveled to Orlando for a conference and her son and mother were able to tag along. Sarah used positive self talk to reassure herself that her son was also experiencing benefits from her job.

Hope, Madelyn, Nicole, and Gabrielle made mention more than once of their children asking, “Mom, do you have another meeting.” No one said this made them feel guilty but rather said statements like that influenced them to make lifestyle changes. Hope took a \$14,000 pay cut to accept another job which would allow her to work hours more



conducive to a family. Gabrielle said frequent statements like this from her oldest child and her own experiences “brought home to me that it [life] had about spun out of control.” Madelyn’s daughter made the statement that “girls have a hard life.” Madelyn interrupted that it was about her job and how hard she worked because her husband was a stay at home dad. Nicole’s children both attended the school where she was principal but said they would not want to have her job because of how hard she has to work.

Hope experienced some difficulties with her preteen son’s behavior shortly before our interviews began. His behavior had become such a concern that Hope was considering enrolling him in a military academy. Before resorting to this option she wondered if her son just needed to spend more time with her, not with Dad or step-father, but with her. She started calling her son every day when he got home from school just to check in and found other opportunities for them to spend more time together. Her son’s behavior began to improve and Hope wondered, “Gee, was that all it was that caused all that?” Maybe it was that simple or maybe her son’s behavior was a more complex response to a variety of forces in his life. Either way, Hope certainly seemed to feel that her work contributed to the struggles her child was experiencing.

According to Hochschild (2001) children do not necessarily respond negatively to the “time bind” that many modern day families experience even though popular media might suggest otherwise. The image that is often presented of children and working mothers is that of children whose self-esteem becomes the “victim” of a mother’s need for self-fulfillment (Warner, 2005). I wrestle with this concern every time I say to my kids I can’t come to lunch today because it’s too far for mommy to drive from work or I can’t play now because I am working on my dissertation. I can’t meet the expectations of “intensive mothering” that society suggests I should (Guendouzi, 2006).

### *The Green Hornet*

The analysis would not be complete without an explanation of the title of the fictional account. During the interview process I asked each woman to choose a metaphor that she believed described the interplay of her role as mother and senior educational leader. Some of the responses included a rock and a hard place, a captain of a boat, a seesaw, and a rosebud. I thought about this question myself and I have to admit that Quentin Tarantino must be credited with reference to *The Green Hornet*. Shortly before beginning my interviews my husband convinced me to go along with him to see the film *Kill Bill, Vol. II*. Quentin Tarantino is not one of my favorite filmmakers but my husband loves his work. My husband and I trade off on movies and when I join him for a *Fight Club* type movie he reciprocates with a *Sleepless in Seattle*. I was begrudgingly talked into watching *Kill Bill, Vol. I* when it came out on video. I think I was in shock initially from all the violence but found at the end a rather interesting storyline so I didn't protest too much when he asked me to go along to see *Vol. II*. This final installment in the series was much less violent and more character driven. The storyline basically was about a woman literally fighting to the death in order to break free from her career as an assassin so she could simply be – a mother.

When we left the movie theater I was just awestruck. The movie had surprisingly feminist overtones and I couldn't help but feel there was some connection to my dissertation. I feel at times like I am fighting against so much just in order to be a mother to my children because of the demands of my job. One of the songs on the *Kill Bill* soundtrack was *The Green Hornet*, a song made famous as the theme of a 1960s television crime drama. Early one evening after a long day of work I was driving my husband and kids around. I was driving at my usual harried pace and talking to everyone

about what needed to be done to get ready for the next day. At one point my husband just starts laughing and at first I am confused. Then I realize what he is laughing about and I start laughing too. All the while I am zipping around traffic *The Green Hornet* is playing in the background. I know why we are both laughing, that song is me. That is my life right now. I am *The Green Hornet*.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS – “REPETITIVE INJURY OF THE SOUL”

Women began pouring into the field of education in the mid-1800s. Approximately 150 years later women are still struggling for a level of self-determination in regards to our roles at all levels of the educational system. Although women are found in disproportionally large numbers at entry level positions in education the trend does not continue as women rise within organizational hierarchy. Conversely, women are disproportionally represented in small numbers at senior-level positions of educational leadership (Blount, 1998; National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

Substantial research has been conducted on the subject of motherhood and career (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Evans, 2006; Fels, 2004; Valian, 1998) but few studies have looked specifically at the implications of motherhood for women reaching for the highest level positions of educational leadership (Blount, 1998; Grogan, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1987). The goal of this dissertation was to explore that interplay of the roles of motherhood and educational leadership and to possibly identify specific challenges that women encounter which may contribute to their current underrepresentation in senior leadership.

In writing the fictional account, *The Green Hornet*, I hoped to bring to light what I saw as both the foreground and background of the lives of six women, illuminating the silences in between. I spent considerable time thinking about how the women from my pilot study and this dissertation research differed and the future implications for women in educational leadership.



The three women who comprised my pilot research group each expressed a series of tensions related to feelings of guilt and frustration as they attempted to maneuver through their personal and professional lives. Notably absent in the current dissertation research was any direct mention of these tensions. Instead of tensions, the current women focused their reflections on a series of sacrifices that were the byproduct of their roles as educational leaders and mothers. These sacrifices included issues of health, commuting, and work-family balance. Each of the women appeared to be conscious of the sacrifices they were making and understood these sacrifices to be in the context of their positions as educational leaders and mothers to young children. I sensed at times that the women were proud of the sacrifices they were willing to make in order to maintain their professional lives and minimize the impact upon their role as mothers.

Self-perception was another emergent theme of this dissertation research. Significant time and attention was paid to discussing how the perceptions of society, children, and co-workers impacted each woman's overall self-perception as mother and career professional. Feelings of frustration were often expressed regarding the double bind that society imposes upon mothers who maintain professional careers. The workplace, being a microcosm of overall society, often left the women feeling eager to prove that parenting would in no way impact the quality of their work. Finally, the perceptions of their children were often the most influential voices. Every woman relayed at least one story where a child had expressed a negative perception of her centered around her career. In some cases, their children's perceptions led them to alter work habits and even make career changes.

The themes of sacrifice and self-perception were clearly evident throughout all six interviews but I couldn't help but ponder why a theme that had been so predominate



during the pilot had all but disappeared from the dissertation research. Although the dissertation data yielded no direct mention to feelings of guilt, the stories that were relayed by the women suggested otherwise. *The Green Hornet* was created from extensive interview data and documents produced by the women. I used their words to create a composite story through which the reader could relive the experiences at the heart of the research. One might glean from the fictional account that the title character struggled with feelings of guilt, although only briefly referenced. A follow-up study with the six women interviewed for this dissertation could explore further the issues of guilt and domesticity, thus serving to further explicate these issues and to determine if indeed the silence surrounding these issues was deliberate.

I felt the women who participated in my research allowed me to experience only a portion of the emotions they feel in regards to their dual roles. There was a glaring silence that existed across all six interviews that has led me to believe there is something about maintaining a senior-level position of educational leadership which may inhibit women from freely discussing the tensions many women experience who are working mothers. Although the actual interview responses contained dialogue all but free of specific reference to emotion I felt the women were alternatively conveying that emotion through their use of stories, metaphors, and their daily logs. All of those items were more open to interpretation but it is from those items that *The Green Hornet* was primarily constructed. I believe *The Green Hornet* is rich in the emotion that ran silently throughout the course of the interviews.

Upon first analysis this left me with a feeling of disconnect from the women. I felt they were clearly not filtering their lives and experiences through the same feminist lens I use to see my life and world. During one of my interviews with Gabrielle she said, "I

learned that stress is the difference between expectation and reality. Expectation is here and reality is here, stress is all this in between.” I interpreted that remark to mean that in order to deal with the stress of motherhood and career she just needed to bring her expectations more in line with reality. That remark was difficult for me to absorb from a feminist perspective in that Gabrielle seemed to suggest that women should accept the space they are in and just deal with it. The feminist in me says we need to call out those forces within society that create the realities which contribute to our stress as mothers and career professionals. Keeping silent about these dilemmas can only do harm to the woman’s psyche.

In 2002 I read Barbara Ehrenreich’s groundbreaking work *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. I read this book during my first semester of the doctoral program as the topic was of interest to my career in the community college and as I was embarking into world of leadership. Ehrenreich’s (2002) book focuses on how the workplace can be such a negative force and that many Americans find work something other than uplifting. One statement from her book that has always stuck with me is her comparison of a physical workplace injury to an emotional workplace injury. Ehrenreich (2002) suggests that many negative workplace conditions contribute to a “repetitive injury of the soul.” That’s how I see many mothers in educational leadership as having a “repetitive injury of the soul” due to the conflicting demands of motherhood and leadership. The women from my pilot study, who were not at the top, saw this and were able to articulate it whereas the women from the dissertation research had either found ways to resolve the tensions or had resigned themselves to these realities.

A number of areas emerged from this project that seems ripe for further exploration. First, it would be worth considering if women who come from different types of family

units would have alternative experiences. For example, one might look at homosexual couples, blended families, or divorced women who share joint custody with a former spouse. Organizational environments could be another venue for exploration. Are there educational institutions that have alternative or flexible work arrangements that seem to promote more women in leadership positions than traditional environments? If so, how might the stories from these women differ from the women of my pilot and dissertation research that came from traditional work environments?

Most significantly, the results of this dissertation suggest further research is necessary to tease apart the tensions that mothers experience who maintain careers as educational leaders. More direct attention should be paid to areas of sacrifice and self-perception that women experience who juggle these dual roles and more specifically, considering how these may ultimately deter women who aspire to leadership positions from even pursuing the path.

The women who participated in this study exemplify some of the challenges women face who pursue dual roles. Each found their own unique way to bring order to the chaos that can accompany parenting and careers and further paved the way for women who will follow their path.



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## APPENDIX A

## Interview Questions

How do women who maintain dual roles as mothers of young children and top educational leaders maneuver through the personal and professional dimensions of their lives? Specifically, I am interested in how some women would describe the process by which they have reached an understanding of the importance of self care along with the care of others?

Share the experiences that led you to your current roles as mother to young children and educational leader?

Let's explore first the role of educational leader.

Could you now share your pathway to motherhood?

What personal and professional decisions were made when you assumed both roles?

Let's start with the professional decisions.

Could you continue now with the personal decisions?

How would you describe the dynamics and implications between these roles?

Share some dynamics you encounter.

What implications have you found?

Share the feelings you have experienced as you have maintained both roles, towards others and yourself.

Choose a metaphor or physical image that best represents the interaction of these roles in your life.

What meanings do these experiences hold for your sense of self?



## APPENDIX B

### Informed Consent

#### APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY

#### **Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects**

Title of Project Female Educational Leaders and Motherhood

Investigator(s) Angelia T. Wright

#### **I. Purpose of this Research/Project**

The purpose of this study is to provide a narrative of the experiences of top, female, educational leaders who are also mothers to young children (i.e. children 12 years of age and younger). These women should be 30 – 55 years of age, married or in a long term relationship with a partner, and a top, educational leader (e.g. Deans, Directors, Vice Presidents, or Assistant Superintendents, etc.). The interview questions were first piloted by one woman from a K-12 demographic, community college demographic, and university demographic. Each of the women will be married or in a long term relationship, 30 – 55 years of age, a leader in their educational setting, and the mother to young children all under the age of 12.

#### **II. Procedures**

The interview questions will be presented to women from a K-12 demographic, community college demographic, and university demographic. Each of the women will be married or in a long term relationship, 30 – 55 years of age, a leader in their educational setting, and the mother to young children all under the age of 12. All responses will be tape recorded and the investigator will be taking notes as well.

Interviews will last approximately 1 hour and will be conducted in a setting convenient for the interviewee (i.e. the workplace). Each participant will be interviewed three times.

One follow visit will be necessary with each participant to clarify any questions regarding the original interviews. This process should take approximately an hour and again would be arranged at a time and location convenient for the interviewee.

#### **III. Risks**

No risks are anticipated from the interview questions. Participants will be informed of their right to refrain from answering any questions and to withdraw from the study at any time.

#### **IV. Benefits**

No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate. The benefit derived from this study will be the intellectual contribution made to the study of educational leadership and women's studies.

Each participant will be offered a copy of the resulting document.

#### **V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Participants should be informed that their names and any identifying information regarding the educational system or institution they work for will not be identified in the results published. Only the investigator and her dissertation committee will be informed of the identity of the participants. Regional demographics and educational level will be the only identifiers published for each participant. At no time will the researchers release the results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without written consent.

Audiotaping will occur during the interviews and participants will certainly be informed. The audiotapes will be stored in the investigator's home and will be transcribed by the investigator. Only the investigator and her dissertation committee will have access to these audiotapes. At the conclusion of the study all audiotapes will be destroyed.

#### **VI. Compensation**

There will be no compensation for participation in this study. No funds have been set aside for any injury or illness resulting from this project.

#### **VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

Participants are free to withdraw from this study at any time and are free not to answer any questions that they choose.

There may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a participant should not continue in the study.

#### **VIII. Approval of Research**

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board of Appalachian State University .

March 18, 2004 (#04-128)

IRB Approval Date

March 18, 2005

Approval Expiration Date

## IX. Participant's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities: to inform the investigator if at any time I prefer to refrain from answering a question or wish to withdraw from the study.

## X. Participant's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant signature

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone/e-mail

Angelia T. Wright                      (336)771-0588    cwright4@triad.rr.com

<b><u>Robert L. Johnson</u></b>	<b><u>828-262-2692</u></b>	<b><u>johnsonrl@appstate.edu</u></b>
Administrator, IRB	Telephone	e-mail
Graduate Studies and Research		
Appalachian State University		
Boone, NC 26608		

**Subjects must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent.**

## APPENDIX C

## Jane's Daily Log

- 6:00 a.m. = Alarm goes off  
Lets out dog  
Showers
- 6:30 a.m. = Husband gets up
- 6:40 a.m. = Eats breakfast
- 7:00 a.m. = Makes four bottles and packs diaper bag for daycare
- 7:15 a.m. = Wakes both children and gets them dressed
- 7:45 a.m. = Leaves to drop children at daycare
- 8:10 a.m. = On the road to work  
Check voicemail and return calls while driving
- 8:40 a.m. = Arrives at work
- 9:30 a.m. = Meetings start and run through lunch
- 5:00 p.m. = Catches up on emails and phone calls
- 5:45 p.m. = Departs for home
- 6:15 p.m. = Arrives home  
No time to change clothes, immediately sits down to dinner with family
- 7:00 p.m. = Bathes the children while husband clears dishes from the table
- 7:30 p.m. = Begins putting older child to bed
- 8:00 p.m. = Husband is asleep  
Loads dishwasher and runs washing machine  
Washes bottles from daycare
- 9:00 p.m. = Feeds infant and attempts to get infant to sleep
- 10:00 p.m. = Showers
- 10:30 p.m. = Reads
- 11:00 p.m. = Bed



### AUTHOR RESUME

Angelia Trivette Wright was born in Boone, North Carolina. She attended Green Valley Elementary School and graduated from Watauga High School in June of 1989. The following August she entered Appalachian State University, and in May of 1995 she received a Bachelor of Science in History and in December of 1997 received a Master's degree in Psychology. In August of 2002 she began study toward a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at Appalachian State University. She received her EdD in May of 2008.

Angelia Trivette Wright has worked in education since 1997 at both two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions. Prior to her current position, she worked for nine years in the community college system. Her positions included psychology instructor, professional development facilitator, special assistant to the president, and department chair. For the past two years, she has served as a program coordinator at Duke University.

